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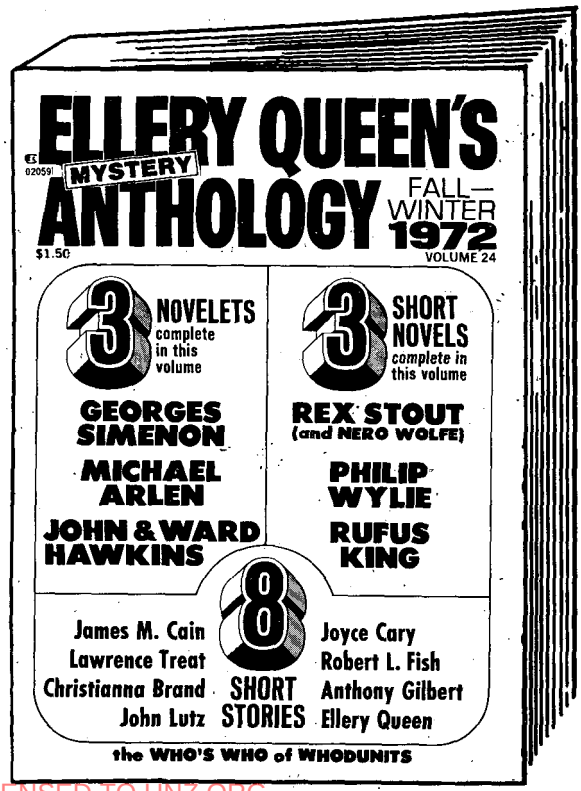

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15

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DON'T WORRY, JOHNNY	Robert L. Fish	6
THE SPY WHO WAS EXPECTED	Edward D. Hoch	17
THE RESURRECTION MEN	Lillian de la Torre	30
HONG KONG OR WHEREVER	Florence V. Mayberry	42
THE MATCHBOOK COLLECTOR	Isaac Asimov	57
A PUFF OF ORANGE SMOKE	Lael J. Littke	71
THE METHOD ACTOR	Jeff Sweet	76
EVERYBODY LIKED FLORINDA	Luna Wolf	81
A GIRL CAN'T ALWAYS HAVE EVERYTHING	Tonita S. Gardner	87
THE CASE OF THE NASHING TEETH	Francis M. Nevins, Jr.	94
MR. STRANG VERSUS THE SNOWMAN	William Brittain	98
ONE MAN'S IGNORANCE	Robert Edward Eckels	110
THE TIPOFF	Josh Pachter	120
THE PLASTIC JUNGLE	Joyce Harrington	125
THE LAST WIZARD	Avram Davidson	136
C AS IN CUTTHROAT	Lawrence Treat	138
WINNER TAKES ALL	Patricia McGerr	151
THE JURY BOX	John Dickson Carr	96
INDEX TO VOLUME SIXTY		162-16

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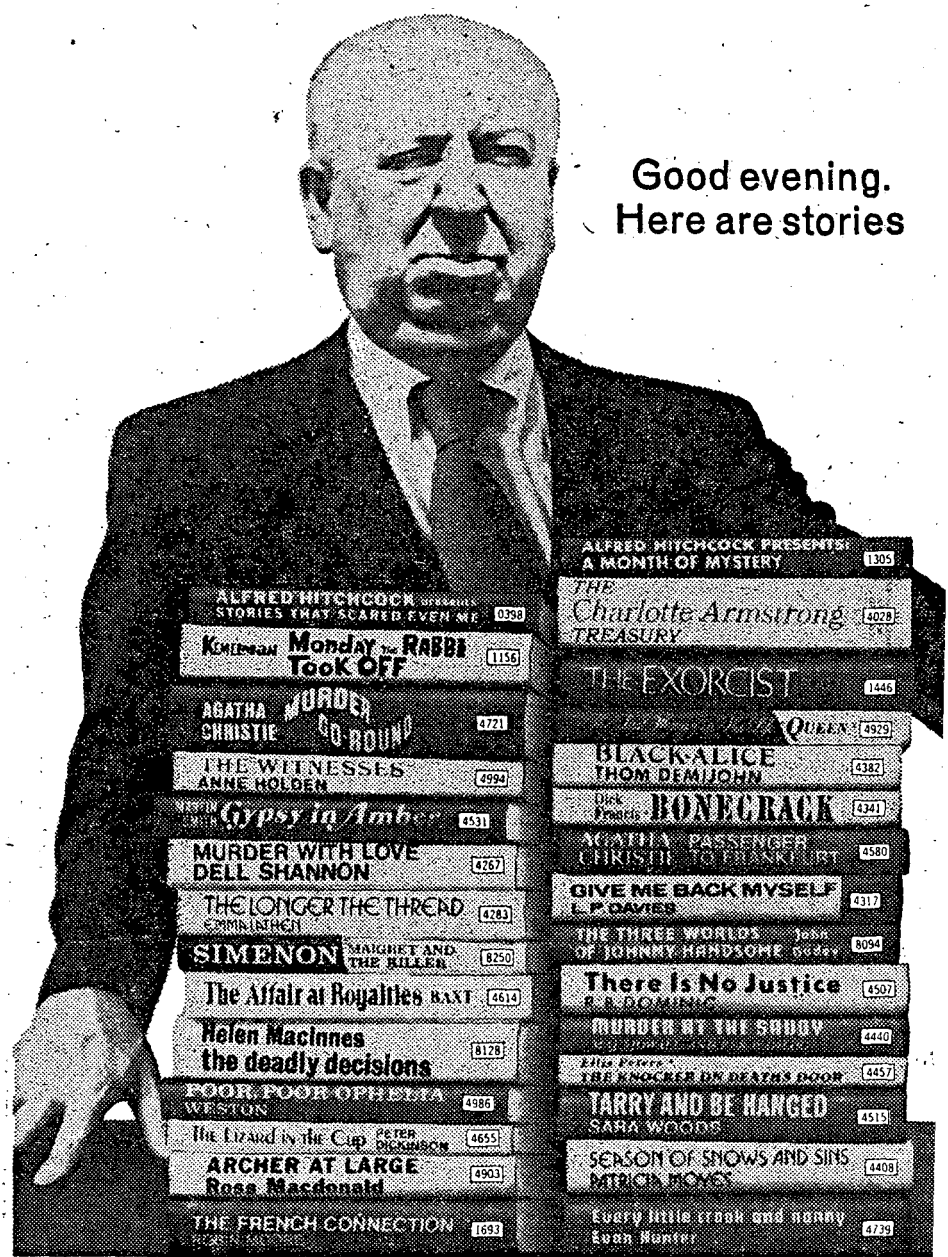
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Here are stories
ALFRED HITCHCOCK presents STORIES THAT SCARED EVEN ME 0398
Monday the RABBI TOOK OFF 1136
AGATHA CHRISTIE MURDER 4721
THE WITNESSES ANNE HOLDEN 4994
Gypsy in Amber 4531
MURDER WITH LOVE DELL SHANNON 4267
THE LONGER THE THREAD 4283
SIMENON MAIGRET AND THE KILLER 8250
The Affair at Royalties BAXT 4614
Helen MacInnes the deadly decisions 8128
POOR POOR OPHELIA 4986
The Lizard in the Cup PETER DICKINSON 4655
ARCHER AT LARGE Ross Macdonald 4903
THE FRENCH CONNECTION 1693
ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS A MONTH OF MYSTERY 1305
THE Charlotte Armstrong TREASURY 4028
THE EXORCIST 1446
QUEEN 4929
BLACK ALICE THOM DEMIJOHN 4382
Dick Francis BONECRACK 4341
AGATHA PASSENGER CHRISTIE TO FRANKFURT 4580
GIVE ME BACK MYSELF L. P. DAVIES 4317
THE THREE WORLDS OF JOHNNY HANDSOME 8094
There Is No Justice R. R. DOMMING 4507
MURDER AT THE SHRUBY 4440
THE KNOCKER ON DEATH'S DOOR 4457
TARRY AND BE HANGED SARA WOODS 4515
SEASON OF SNOWS AND SINS MIRICIA MOYES 4408
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DON'T WORRY, JOHNNY

by ROBERT L. FISH

The small statuette of blind-folded Justice stood on the side table in her office, flanked by neatly piled legal abstracts. The statuette had been a gift from some colleague; there had been admirers to bestow gifts, she remembered, but somehow they had never given themselves.

She brought her attention back to the parole officer facing her. Johnny, she thought, should have known he couldn't really keep it a secret from her.

The parole officer reached out and crushed his cheap cigar in the ashtray.

"He'll be in trouble again in no time, Miss Benson," he said. His voice recognized the inevitability of trouble with ex-cons; like sunrise and sunset —into prison, out of prison, into prison.

"You say you know the girl?"

"Yes, ma'am. She's a—a tramp."

"What's her name?" A pencil came into her hand automatically.

"Mavis Gallagher. She's got a room at the Glenmont, you want to call it a room. She sure isn't the one to straighten Johnny out. No morals plus expensive tastes."

Like Johnny, Lauretta Benson thought. She forced herself to smile enigmatically across the desk, hiding the pain.

"I'm just the boy's lawyer," she said, turning up the palms of her well-manicured hands. "Not his guardian."

"I know," the parole officer said, "but I thought I ought to mention it to you." He came to his feet, brushing ash from his

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wrinkled suit, looking down at her neatly coiffed head with sympathy. "He's wild, Johnny is. You've been more than a lawyer to him, Miss Benson, you been like a mother to him. And it's only because of your defending him in court that he's only been sent up once." He shook his head. "Now the kid's got a record, he won't be so easy to get off in the future."

"I know," she said softly, but she was saying it more for herself than for the officer.

She watched him tug his misshapen hat into place and move to the door, watched him nod and then close the door behind him. She stared at the blank panel of the door, not seeing it, seeing only Johnny as she had first seen him six years before. She closed her eyes, fighting down the panic that rose at thought of losing him.

More than a lawyer to Johnny? Yes. But a mother? God, no!

It had all started when the court had appointed her to act as Public Defender in the case of the State of New York vs. John Daniels in Juvenile Court on a charge of breaking and entering, plus felonious assault on the elderly woman who had come downstairs to find her small shop being ransacked. Johnny Daniels, age 16, orphan. Handsome, reckless, brash—and also amoral, dangerous. And she a respectable lawyer, age 36, a spinster lady, as she called herself wryly, although she had had opportunities. But she had also had a fear of men.

She had arranged bail for the boy and had taken him home to wash up before the trial—at least, he would come into court with clean hands in one respect if not in the other. And Johnny, swaggering into the living room draped only in a towel and asking her if she'd like to help him take his bath!

Her first reaction had been shock, followed by an almost irrational anger, and then there had been the shame of knowing her own desire. Could she possibly lose that fear with this child? This child! She still felt that flush of shame, but also the painful want, as he came up to her, reaching for her almost casually.

"You ain't a bad-looking chick, you know?" he said. "Not bad at all."

They had been lovers for three years. Discreet, but lovers. Under Johnny's expert tutelage—learned where, and when and from whom?—she had come to appreciate the infinite capacity of her still-youthful body. And in return Johnny had his own apartment, his clothes, and an ample allowance which he

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allowed people to believe came from his skill at gambling.

But Johnny had not been satisfied. He had tried to rob a bank, overlooking the hidden cameras, and despite all of Lauretta Benson's ability, Johnny had been convicted by the photographic proof. He had pulled down a big five but had come out in three, being bright, but for those three years her bed had been empty. And now he had come out of prison, outfitted himself in style once again at her expense, and had avoided her.

She had thought it was merely getting accustomed to civilian life, but now she had been told it was another woman. She felt ill at the thought; she came to her feet suddenly, bending to the intercom.

"Dorothy?"

"Yes, Miss Benson?" Her personal secretary's voice was incurious.

"I—I'm not feeling well at the moment. I'm going home. I'll take some work with me in case I feel better later on, but please cancel the rest of my appointments for today."

"Yes, Miss Benson." The sympathy subtly changed to a more businesslike tone. "I hope you feel better by tomorrow. You're due in court in the afternoon."

"I know. I'll be there."

She shoveled papers in her attaché case like an automaton, closed it with a snap, and let herself out a side door of her office, leading directly to the corridor. She didn't feel like facing her office staff; she didn't feel like facing anyone. The elevator pointer was rising rapidly in her direction; she hesitated one moment and then pushed through to the stairwell. Even the thought of possible commiseration in the eyes of the old elevator man was too much for her at the moment.

She let herself into her dim shade-down apartment, dropping her attache case, and walked a bit unsteadily toward the sideboard. She poured herself an unaccustomed drink and raised it to her lips with shaking fingers. There was the calculated clearing of a throat from the depths of an easy chair. Her drink jerked and spilled.

Johnny Daniels was smiling at her easily. "Hi, Lorrie."

"Johnny!" She put her glass down shakily. "You startled me!" Her eyes moved about. "How did you get in?"

He raised a thin strip of celluloid casually; his smile was cold.

"You changed the lock since I went away, eh? But you

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forgot I just graduated college up the river. You ought to double-lock them doors, Lorrie, a smart woman like you—" He tilted his handsome head toward the sideboard. "Go ahead, don't mind me. I'm a couple up on you, anyways."

"I really didn't want a drink." All I wanted, she added silently, was for you to tell me the parole officer was lying; or mistaken. And I only changed the lock because I lost my keys, Johnny, not to keep you out. She walked over to his easy chair and sat down gracefully on the arm, looking down at him possessively, running her fingers through his hair.

He shook her hand away, trying to do it lightly.

"Hey, don't bruise the dandruff. It takes time for that Sing Sing trim to grow out. Give it air."

She tried to smile but it was a grimace. Her hand moved from his hair to stroke his cheek; the contact brought desire against her wish. "Johnny—would you like—?"

He pushed himself from the chair abruptly, almost putting her off balance. He looked down at her, his face expressionless, and shook his head.

"Not today, Josephine. I ain't in the mood."

She knew then it was no mistake. Johnny would never be in the mood again. She forced herself to seeming calmness, walking across the room to a sofa there. She sat down and crossed her legs, aware that her ankles were still trim, her legs still lovely.

"Then what are you doing here?"

Johnny studied her for several minutes, then walked back to his chair and sat down. He leaned toward her.

"I want a favor, Lorrie."

"*You* want a favor? Another?"

"This will be the last one." There was a final cutting of ties in his tone. "I want an alibi for tomorrow afternoon. One o'clock."

At first the words did not make sense, although after short consideration she realized they had not unduly surprised her. She was beyond surprise; she was rapidly getting beyond hurt.

"You know, Johnny, you never asked me for an alibi before."

The smile was cruel, instantly removed. "I was saving you, Lorrie. For the big one. This is it."

"Why don't you ask your new girl friend to give you your alibi?"

If she hoped to startle him she failed. Johnny grinned at her derisively. "So you heard

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about Mavis, huh? Well, what the hell did you expect? I'm young, and so is she." He shrugged. "Anyways, she couldn't alibi a priest. She's got a reputation worse than my own. But you—"

Lauretta Benson felt an almost hysterical urge to laugh.

"Johnny, Johnny! What makes you think I would alibi you?"

"Because you're a pigeon, Lorrie. Think a bit. You ain't stupid. Think how it would look in the papers, a sixteen-year-old kid seduced by a woman of—" He frowned at her. "What were you then, Lorrie? Forty?"

"Thirty-six," she said faintly.

"You looked older, but never mind," Johnny said. "It's the same thing. A client of yours—juvenile case—poor dumb kid, no relatives, no mama to teach him better, no experience. Court says you got to defend him. Kid don't know which end is up. You take him home and make him do what you want—because if he don't, you'll see to it he gets the works. Kid got no choice, see? And for three years running." His cold eyes looked at her curiously. "How does it read? Do you want me to draw you a diagram?"

She stared at him, numb with disbelief.

"What do you think?" he asked again. "Picture it in the *Daily News*."

Lauretta Benson took a deep breath. It didn't seem possible this was happening, not to her.

"I would deny it, of course."

Johnny laughed, a genuine laugh.

"You? Man, Lorrie, you come alive for the first time in your life that first time." He chuckled at the memory. "You think nobody noticed? The difference in you, I mean?" She felt her face reddening. Had they noticed, she wondered?

Johnny seemed to read her mind. He leaned forward, a friend. "Lorrie, take my word, you're a lousy liar, especially about how you feel when I just touch you. Don't put it to the test, because you'd lose. Believe me."

Lauretta Benson tried to believe she was actually engaged in this monstrous dialogue.

"I can't alibi you. I've got to be in court tomorrow afternoon."

"So be in court," Johnny said with sudden ease. He took a cigarette from a box on the end table, lit it, and tossed the match carelessly toward an ashtray. "All you got to do is be here at one o'clock, in case the phone rings, or some nosey neighbor happens to be looking this way. After that, do what

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you want." He shrugged. "The story is I got here at one o'clock on the button, and you had to go to court, like you say, so you left me here. And I hung around for a while and then I got tired of hanging around, so I blew." He smiled at her, her former intransigence forgiven. "I knew you wouldn't let an old pal down."

"Johnny."

"Yeah?" His face hardened, prepared for argument and prepared to deal with it.

"You wouldn't do anything—well, foolish?"

He mimicked her. "No, Johnny, I wouldn't do anything—well, foolish."

He came to his feet, pinched out his cigarette, and slid the blackened butt into his pocket, prison-style. He walked to the window and pulled the heavy drapes aside, letting in the late-afternoon light, and then moved to the door. He opened it and stared at her, a sardonic twinkle in his eye.

Lauretta Benson felt as if she were being undressed; her hand tugged at her skirt. Johnny grinned derisively. "Have fun," he said, and winked at her. The door closed quietly behind him.

Through the open curtains the shadows of coming evening enclosed the room; the cries of children in the street filtered past the locked window frames, echoing faintly in the darkening room. She came to her feet slowly and found her way to the sideboard without lighting a lamp, pouring a large whiskey, sipping it gratefully, her mind at work.

An alibi for Johnny tomorrow afternoon at one o'clock or—what? An end to her career? Disgrace? Did it really matter? Could anything she did make her feel more ashamed than she felt at this moment? She sipped the whiskey and then poured another.

She found herself with the classified section of the telephone directory in her hand, searching lists, flipping pages. She reached up and switched on a lamp; in the sudden light the number she wanted seemed to spring at her from the printed page. She took a deep breath and dialed, listening to the telephone at the other end begin to ring.

Oh, Johnny! Why are you making me do it?

It was amazing to her, the following afternoon, that her session in court, short as it was, could possibly have passed without the judge noticing her inner conflict, or her opposing attorney—a legal enemy of long standing—both recognizing and taking advantage of her obvious confusion. Obvious to her but

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apparently not to them. I must be a better actress than I realized, she thought, and paid off the taxi before her apartment door, relieved that the court session had finally been overcome. She tipped accurately and slid from the cab seat to the sidewalk, aware of the driver's admiring glance.

There was a car parked in front of the building, apparently undisturbed by the NO PARKING sign beside it. She passed it without paying any attention; the three men in the rear seat and the two in front registered on her mind merely as part of the street scene. It was only as she was in the process of taking her key ring from her purse that she became aware of the car door opening and a man approaching. He seemed to wait until she had found the proper key and then tapped her diffidently on the shoulder.

"Miss Benson?"

She swung about, startled. "Yes?"

"Police." An identification card was held for her inspection. Her eyes automatically swept the car at the curb; Johnny was sitting calmly in the rear seat between two quite-obvious detectives. As she watched, Johnny raised his wrists and shook the handcuffs, grinning at her derisively. She was suddenly aware of the parole officer looking at her sadly from the front seat. She turned abruptly to the detective at her side.

"What trouble is Johnny in?"

He tucked the card carefully back into his wallet. "Could I have a moment of your time, Miss Benson?" He saw the direction of her eyes. "They'll wait. In your apartment?"

Her eyes turned to Johnny's face. He raised his shoulders humorously.

"Of course," she said, and managed the key into the keyhole. She led the way to the stairway and made her way up to the second floor. The detective climbed behind her, his eyes studiously avoiding the trim legs above him. They turned into a corridor and paused before a door.

Lauretta Benson fitted the key into the lock, turning it twice to unlatch it. She swung it open and flicked on a light, staring about, as if something might have changed since she had last seen it; but the room was quiet and neat. She turned, looking at the respectful man behind her.

"I saw your identification card, but I forget your name."

"Sergeant Collier." The sergeant closed the door gently, glancing around the room. His

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eyes came back to hers. "Miss Benson, would you care to sit down?"

"I'm fine." Her tone was businesslike. "What kind of trouble is Johnny in?"

Sergeant Collier looked at her. "Quite a bit, I'm afraid," he said, and dug into his pocket. "Miss Benson, I'll try and waste a minimum of your time. I want you to look at some photographs."

"Photographs?" She was honestly surprised.

"Three of them." He brought them from his pocket. "Please."

"Of course," she said, and took them. "What am I supposed to be looking for?"

"Just look, please."

She stared at the top one. It showed a typical scene in a bank, except that a crouched man broke the normal harmony. He was holding a revolver, pointing it stiff-armed toward the teller's cage. The teller could not be seen in the picture. The crouched man had a woman's nylon stocking pulled over his head with eyeholes cut in it; he wore gloves and the collar of his windbreaker was pulled to his ears.

In the background a guard had half turned, one foot lifted as if starting in a walking race. Spectators stood with frozen faces; one woman, obviously unaware of what was happening, stood patiently making out a slip at a counter.

Lauretta Benson looked up. "Yes?"

"Would you look at the next picture, please?"

She shifted the top one to the bottom and studied the second photograph. It was the same scene, but taken by a different camera from a different angle. Now the teller was visible; he was twisted unnaturally on the floor behind his cage, his legs drawn up, his hands on his stomach. Lauretta Benson drew in a sharp breath.

"Yes," the sergeant said quietly. "He died an hour ago in White Plains General. In the Emergency." His finger rested on the photograph over her shoulder. "See the clock? One o'clock—that's when it took place. Now, would you please look at the last picture?"

She shifted pictures again. This one seemed to be a duplicate of the first, except in this picture the man did not have the stocking mask on or the gloves. She saw with a start that the man was Johnny, and then realized the picture was both old and familiar. It had been the State's prime evidence at Johnny's trial three years before. Her eyes rose.

"Yes?"

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Sergeant Collier looked at her quietly.

"We picked Johnny Daniels up at his apartment about a half hour ago. He was packing. We found a pair of gloves and a lumberjacket jammed down in a rubbish barrel in the basement of his apartment building; they match the ones in the picture. You'll say they're common enough items, and others live in the apartment as well—both true statements. Still . . .

"It's also true we haven't found the gun, or the money. Yet. But we say the man is the same height and build as Johnny Daniels, and that the men in both the picture taken today and the one taken three years ago hold their arms out the same way, stiff, like on a pistol range."

He took a deep breath and continued, "Johnny Daniels says he was here, coming into this apartment, at one o'clock today. We say he was at the Mamaroneck National Bank at one o'clock, and we say these pictures prove it."

Lauretta Benson remained silent, waiting. Sergeant Collier's eyes were steady on her face.

"Miss Benson, we know you're a friend of Johnny Daniels, and we know you practically adopted him and that you are his lawyer. But we also know you're a respectable member of the bar and an officer of the law yourself. This is a capital offense. Daniels claims he was with you at one o'clock. Is that true?"

She could feel the lash of Johnny's words the day before. She could see him sitting downstairs now, between two detectives. She could hear the threat in his voice.

"Miss Benson?"

She took a deep breath. "It's true, Sergeant. I was on my way out when Johnny came. I told him to go in and make himself comfortable, that I was due in court."

Sergeant Collier's face fell. "That's what he said."

"That's what it was."

The detective frowned. "Miss Benson, are you sure of your times?"

"I'm—well, I suppose nobody is ever too sure, especially in a case like this." Lauretta Benson shrugged diffidently. "If you have any doubts as to the accuracy of my clocks, you're welcome to check them. I remember looking at the one on my bedroom dresser just before I left, and I'm sure it said one o'clock, or a few minutes to one."

Sergeant Collier shrugged helplessly. "I suppose I'd best," he said, and walked from the room looking beaten.

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Lauretta Benson wanted a drink but she felt she could hardly take one at this moment. In the silence of the room the ticking of the clock on the mantel seemed to emphasize the alibi she had provided for Johnny Daniels. It was with a slight sense of awakening that she became aware the detective had returned and was addressing her.

"Your bedroom clock checks with my watch, and that's as accurate as the one at the station. And at the bank." He walked to the window, opened it, and leaned out, bellowing "Mike!"

A car door opened and a head poked out. "Yeah?"

"Bring him up!"

Sergeant Collier stood facing the door, his eyes expressionless. Lauretta Benson wanted a drink more than ever. There was the sound of scuffling feet in the corridor and the two policemen edged their way past the pale woman, bringing Johnny into the room. The parole officer followed, shutting the door behind him. Johnny was half seated, half thrown into an easy chair. He started to remonstrate, then shrugged and subsided.

"You're cute, Johnny," Sergeant Collier said.

Johnny Daniels frowned. He didn't like the tone of voice, the confidence in the detective's voice. He hid his sudden tenseness with belligerency. "She didn't support my alibi?"

"Did I say she didn't?" Sergeant Collier asked. "One o'clock, wasn't it?"

"One o'clock!" Johnny said. "I've only said so a hundred times!"

"Who's arguing with you?" Sergeant Collier looked at his seated prisoner with near-admiration. "You're cool, Johnny. I've got to give you that." He leaned over the prisoner, his voice curious. "Did you really think Miss Benson would cover for you? On a murder charge, Johnny? That was stupid."

"What do you mean? I was here, I tell you!"

"At one o'clock. I'm sure," Sergeant Collier said softly. He held up a wrinkled piece of paper he had been palming in his hand and read it. "*564 Thistlewood Drive. Meet Johnny one o'clock.*"

Lauretta Benson stared. "But that's this address! Where did you get it?"

Sergeant Collier folded the paper carefully and slid it into his billfold. His eyes came up to study Johnny. There was satisfaction in his voice as he spoke to the handsome woman over his shoulder.

"I found it in a pocketbook

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on the floor of your bedroom, Miss Benson. It apparently belonged to a girl named Mavis Gallagher." He heard the indrawn breath behind him and felt sorry for the further shock he was about to afford her. "I'm sorry, Miss Benson, but she's in your bathroom. Stabbed to death."

Johnny Daniels stared wordlessly across the room, straining against the strong hands of the masklike plainclothes policeman on either side of him. His lean handsome face was pale, outraged.

"Don't worry, Johnny," Lauretta Benson said soothingly. "I've always taken care of you, and I'll see to it you're taken care of this time. Don't worry, Johnny."

INDEX TO VOLUME SIXTY — JULY-DECEMBER 1972

(Continued from page 162)

LYON, DANA: The Good Companions ..... Nov. 116
MACDONALD, ROSS: The Missing Sister Case ..... Oct. 78
MARKS, DENNIS: The "Variety" Murder Case ..... Nov. 105
MATHIESON, THEODORE: The F. Scott Fitzgerald Murder Case ..... Nov. 85
MAYBERRY, FLORENCE V.: The Thing on the Beach ..... July 32
So Lonely, So Lost, So Frightened ..... Aug. 133
Hong Kong or Wherever ..... Dec. 42
MCGERR, PATRICIA: Winner Takes All ..... Dec. 151
MORRELL, DAVID: The Dripping ..... Aug. 113
NEVINS, JR., FRANCIS M.: After the Twelfth Chapter ..... Sept. 66
The Case of the Nashing Teeth (verse) ..... Dec. 94
PACHTER, JOSH: Invitation to a Murder ..... Aug. 102
The Theft of the Spy Who ..... Sept. 31
The Tipoff ..... Dec. 120
PENTECOST, HUGH: Jericho and the Two Ways To Die ..... Sept. 148
Pierre Chambrun Defends Himself ..... Nov. 6
PHAON, JERROLD: Hunting Season ..... Nov. 98
PIERCE, JOHN: Inspector Seal Reminisces ..... Aug. 4
POWELL, JAMES: The Mandalasian Garotte ..... July 8
Ganelon and the Master Thief ..... Oct. 4
RICHTER, JOAN: A Matter of Trust ..... Nov. 3
ROSENTHAL, CAROLE: The Dark Room ..... July 10
SLATER, ELAINE: Hard Luck Joey ..... Sept. 9
STEVENS, R. L.: The Forbidden Word ..... July 5
The Legacy ..... Aug. 12
SWEET, JEFF: The Cop Who Liked Old Movies ..... Oct. 3
The Method Actor ..... Dec.
SYMONS, JULIAN: Pickup on the Dover Road ..... July
The Sensitive Ears of Mr. Small ..... Oct.
TREAT, LAWRENCE: The Haunted Portrait ..... July 1
G As in Garrote ..... Aug. 1
T As in Thief ..... Oct. 1
C As in Cutthroat ..... Dec. 1
VAN NESS, LIKA: Something Like Growing Pains ..... Nov.
WOLF, LUNA: Everybody Liked Florinda ..... Dec.
WOOLRICH, CORNELL: The Lie Sept. 1

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a *NEW* Rand spy story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Rand wasn't easily taken aback, but the intercepted radio message startled him. How had his name come into the affair? . . . This, the 24th Rand adventure, presented the Double-C man with an apparently simple problem in concealed communications—but sometimes the simple ones are the most deceptive, the most baffling. . . .

THE SPY WHO WAS EXPECTED

by EDWARD D. HOCH

"We've just deciphered a message that might interest you, sir," young Parkinson said, pausing at the doorway to Rand's cluttered little office overlooking the muddy Thames.

"Have you, now?" Rand glanced up from the tedium of the report he was writing, grateful for the distraction. "Let's see it."

Parkinson came all the way in, handing the message sheet across the desk. "It was intercepted during the night—a fairly powerful radio transmission from a ship somewhere in Portsmouth harbor, near as we can tell. The people upstairs sent it to Concealed Communications. Only took us an hour to break it."

Rand grunted and accepted the message sheet. He read the brief sentences quickly: AWAITING RANDS ARRIVAL BEFORE PASSING SAMOS PHOTOS. MUST WEIGH ANCHOR AT DAWN WEDNESDAY.

Rand came alert at the sight of his name. "What is this?"

"Seems to be your name, sir. Know anything about it?"

"Not a thing. But Rand is not that uncommon—there are dozens in the telephone directory. It must mean one of the others."

Parkinson cleared his throat. Though he'd been with Double-C for nearly seven years he still regarded Rand as a superior to be approached with circumspection. "These Samos photos, sir.

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Could they be the ones stolen from Sir Charles?"

Rand considered the possibility. "It's worth checking on. Leave me the message and I'll ask Hastings about it."

The Samos theft had been the subject of speculation within British Intelligence for the past ten days, ever since Sir Charles Worthington, an expert on matters of erosion, had reported the theft of his brief case from a parked automobile. He had left it unguarded for only an instant, while purchasing a copy of *The Times* from a news vendor. Whether the fast-acting thief was merely a passing felon or someone who had followed Sir Charles for hours waiting his chance, no one knew. But the brief case was gone, and the seeds of an international incident were planted.

Rand found Hastings in the executive dining room, just finishing his lunch. "Don't tell me you've come down to eat!" the balding man exclaimed. "I haven't seen you in this place all year."

Rand was not in the habit of eating a noonday meal, relying on a sturdy breakfast and a good dinner to carry him through the day. "I came to find you," he said. "My people deciphered a message of some interest."

Hastings read the message quickly. "Know what it's about?"

Rand sat down opposite him. "No idea. It might be my name or just a coincidence. But the mention of the Samos photos interested us. Would those be the ones in Sir Charles's stolen brief case?"

Hastings glanced around the half-empty dining room. "Let's go back to my office, shall we?"

"Finish your lunch first."

The older man grimaced and pushed his plate away. "Not worth the trouble. You've spoiled my appetite."

Rand followed Hastings down the hall to his office and took his favorite chair opposite the desk. "Then there is something to this Samos theft?"

"Until now we were hoping the brief case was taken by some street hood who threw the whole thing in the river. I fear this message casts a different light on it."

"Exactly what are the photos?"

"Views of the north coast of Scotland, from Cape Wrath to Pentland Firth, taken by the American Samos satellite."

Rand grunted. "Hardly seems worth all the fuss of this past week and a half. I heard talk of an international in-

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cident. Are we expecting a Viking invasion along the north coast?"

"The pictures themselves are of absolutely no military value."

"Then what—?"

"As you know, the Americans began their Samos program more than a decade ago. They even have a different top-secret designation for it now, but it's still the same spy-in-the-sky. The satellite photographs portions of the earth as it passes overhead, then periodically ejects its film which is picked up by planes after it re-enters the earth's atmosphere. Although the entire program is top secret with the Americans, a good deal of it is known. One key factor that is still secret, however, is the quality of the photographs themselves.

"None of the Samos photos has ever been released, simply because they would tell the Russians just how effective the spy-in-the-sky really is. Sir Charles obtained these photos on loan as a special favor to the British government, so he could complete some important coastal survey work on erosion. Of course we could take our own photos of the coastline as it is today, and then wait five years to take a matching set. But by studying the American pictures from five years ago, compared with our current ones, he hoped to complete the erosion study at once."

"But somebody stole the pictures."

"Exactly. We're having the damnedest time explaining it to the Americans. You know they've always been touchy about our security since the days of Fuchs, and this certainly doesn't help matters any."

"Then you think the radio message is authentic?"

"We've kept the theft quiet. Only the people in this building know of it. So the message couldn't very well be a fake."

"The cipher was a fairly simple one, though," Rand argued. "Perhaps they wanted us to crack it and find my name there."

"Quite possible," Hastings agreed. "But in that event I see no reason why we shouldn't play their game. If they're awaiting Rand's arrival, we shall certainly give them Rand!"

The intercepted radio message had come from one of a number of motor yachts lying at anchor in the harbor at Portsmouth. The direction finder had not pinpointed it more closely than that, but Rand was able to narrow the field with just a few questions. The smaller craft did not have radios

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powerful enough to have sent the message, and of the ones properly equipped, only three were due to leave the harbor on Wednesday morning.

"These three here," the harbormaster said, indicating the names on his list. "The yacht Beverley, out of Boston, skippered by an American sportsman named Harry Rhine. And the Southern Cross, a South African vessel skippered by a bearded giant named Sam Morgan. And a smaller British craft skippered by a woman—the Argentine. That's an odd one. Yachts that size don't generally have such long-range transmitting equipment."

"I'll check them out," Rand said. "Thanks."

"Any time."

He paused at the door. "What did you say the woman's name was? The skipper of the Argentine?"

"Monica Andrews."

Rand nodded and went out. Long ago, in those days closer to his youth, he'd known a girl named Monica Andrews. But then, like Rand, Andrews was a relatively common name.

He went to visit the Southern Cross first and found it tied up to the dock near the naval installations. "Skipper aboard?" he called to a deck hand. "I have to check your papers."

After a few moments a large bearded man appeared on deck "I'm the skipper here. What's the trouble?"

"Sam Morgan? My name's Rand." There was no change of expression and he continued, "Security precautions here, sir. I'll have to check your papers."

The large man grumbled. "This isn't wartime, you know. I'm a South African citizen on a pleasure trip."

"It's just routine," Rand said, starting up the gangplank. It was then that the woman appeared from below deck, and he recognized her at once.

Monica Andrews had not changed a great deal, even though he knew she must be close to 40. She still had a twinkle about her green eyes, and her long brown hair showed only a trace of gray in the morning sunlight. "Why, it's Jeffery Rand, isn't it?" she asked, blinking her eyes a bit like a nearsighted person.

"How are you, Monica? I wondered if it might be you when I saw the name of the Argentine's skipper."

"You know him?" Sam Morgan asked.

"Jeffery and I were friends a long time ago. Are you still with the government?"

Rand shrugged. "Checking yacht registrations. It's something of a comedown."

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"Why, yes," she murmured. "You were always in intelligence work, weren't you? Some sort of hush-hush activity?"

"That was way back."

"Well, what can I do for you?" Morgan asked. "If you're a friend of Monica's you're all right by me."

Rand asked a few routine questions about the crew and the yacht's destination, then turned to Monica Andrews. "If you'll give me the same information it'll save me a trip over to the Argentine."

"That would be a shame," she said with just a trace of a purr. "I'd like you to see my yacht."

"If you wish." Rand turned and shook Morgan's bearlike hand. "Pleased to meet you, sir. Hope we can get together again, next time you're in port."

Walking back along the dock with Monica, Rand was aware of the salt scent of her. In London, during those early days with MI.5 and MI.8, he'd seen her only at the usual dinner parties and country weekends that someone on the younger staff was always arranging. He hadn't thought of her in connection with the outdoors, and certainly not as skipper of a yacht the size of the Argentine.

"We have a crew of four," she explained, leading him on board the sleek cabin cruiser. "But we can sleep eight in emergencies."

He nodded.

"Remember how it was in the old days, Jeffery, when we were so terribly young?"

"You're the only one who ever called me that."

"What? Jeffery? It's your name, isn't it?"

"My middle name, to be exact."

"Did you ever marry that—what's-her-name?"

"No, I never did. It didn't work out."

She tossed her head and he saw the sparkle of green eyes. "Sorry I didn't know that sooner."

He ran his hand across the smooth wood of the cabin. "Where'd you get a yacht like this, Monica?"

"My second husband was very wealthy. This was part of the divorce settlement."

Three other women appeared from below, all about Monica's age and with a sea-stained look about them. She introduced them as the rest of the crew, and Rand had a fleeting speculation about the whole setup.

"Want to stay aboard?" she asked Rand. "We're going for a cruise around the Isle of Wight."

"Oh? I understood you

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weren't leaving port till tomorrow morning."

"We aren't. This is just for a few hours' outing. Tomorrow we sail north to Scotland."

Rand remembered the subject matter of the missing Samos photos. "Perhaps I will come along for a few hours, if you'll promise to have me back for dinner. I still have to see one other skipper, an American named Harry Rhine."

"You won't like him. Nobody does."

"Why not?"

"He thinks he owns the entire harbor. Very inconsiderate."

"What about the South African, Sam Morgan? You seemed friendly enough with him."

"Oh, Sam and I are old friends." She patted Rand's cheek. "But not as old as you, Jeffery."

"Monica!" a blonde crew member called from the bow. "Come give me a hand with this anchor."

She held up her hands to Rand. "On the Argentine even the skipper must work."

"So I see."

After a moment's tugging at the anchor chain she summoned him. "I hate to admit there are still a few things women can't do."

He grinned and bent to the task. "It's snarled on something. Perhaps—"

"What is it?"

Rand was studying a dark indistinct mass just below the water's surface. "I can't be sure." Then he straightened up all at once. "But I think you'd better call the police. It seems to be a body."

Sir Charles Worthington was a slim well-dressed man who looked more like an actor than an expert on erosion. He cocked an eyebrow at Rand and announced, "I've never seen the man before in my life. You brought me all the way down to Portsmouth to look at a dead body?"

"It's not just any body, Sir Charles. The man's pockets contained your notebook and other articles that were in the missing brief case."

The slim man lowered his voice. "The Samos photos?"

"Unfortunately, no. But there can be little doubt that this man took them from your car. I thought you might have noticed him following you."

They were in the outer office at the Portsmouth morgue, a bare functional building that carried with it an air of quiet resignation to the fact of death. It was late in the day and Rand knew his time was running out. Wednesday

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morning was only hours away.

"Well, I never saw him before," Sir Charles repeated, glancing around at the bare walls with ill-concealed distaste. "And I must be getting back to London."

"I'll have to ask you to remain for a few hours longer, Sir Charles. This is a highly delicate matter, as you well realize."

He grumbled and fussed for a cigarette. "Damned photos! Should never have asked the Americans for them in the first place! Nothing but trouble." He succeeded in lighting the cigarette and turned new fury on Rand. "Damn it, man, what good would those pictures be to the Russians? They have their own spy satellites circling the earth and taking pictures."

"They'd like to know how good the American pictures are," Rand explained. "Even some dull shots of the Scottish coastline will tell them that. How well can roads and cars be distinguished? People, houses, ships—can they be seen and counted from that far up? Are the American pictures superior to the ones the Russians are getting? All that's espionage, Sir Charles—the sort of espionage that goes on today."

"Then that dead man was a Russian agent?"

Rand shook his head. "No, he was an independent. He brought the brief case and photos to someone here in Portsmouth and was murdered for his trouble. That someone has made contact with the Russians. We think it's the skipper of one of the yachts anchored here. The message was sent on one of their radios."

Sir Charles sniffed slightly. "Any crew member or visitor could have used the radio."

"But not without the skipper's knowledge—not on crafts this size. Besides, the wording of the message made it obvious the sender was in command."

"You think this person killed the man in there?"

"Most likely," Rand said. "The body was found tangled in the anchor chain of one of the yachts in question."

"How did he die?"

"Seems to have been hit on the head and dumped in the water. It probably happened right alongside the Argentine, perhaps because Monica Andrews did it, or perhaps to make it seem she did."

"Monica Andrews? Don't know her." Sir Charles sniffed again.

"I do," Rand said. "Knew her long ago." He was thinking of the message that had brought him to Portsmouth harbor: AWAITING RANDS ARRIVAL.

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Monica Andrews was awaiting his arrival at the Sailing Club that evening. She came up to him at once, her eyes flashing green fire, and asked, "This won't delay our sailing in the morning, will it? I certainly had nothing to do with that man's death."

"We'll see. I'd like to wind up this matter tonight if I could. What about the American, Harry Rhine? Is he here?"

Monica nodded. "I'll introduce you."

She led him across the lobby to a lounge where a short wiry man was glancing through the latest issue of the *Kipling Journal*. He turned at Monica's introduction and extended his hand. "Yes, Mr. Rand. I heard from Morgan that you were around asking questions. You don't really expect me to swallow that line about checking yacht registrations, do you? Not after you found that body!"

"Anyone can find a body," Rand murmured. The American was brisk and sure of himself. Rand would not have wanted to race against him.

"Who was the fellow, anyway? How'd he get fouled in Monica's chain?"

"A small-time sneak thief from London, near as we can tell. He was hired to do a job."

Harry Rhine narrowed his eyes. "You Scotland Yard?"

"Not really. Let's just say I represent the authorities."

"Monica's afraid you'll hold everybody in port. I'm racing day after tomorrow, you know. I can't be held here."

"I'm sure you won't be held unless you're a suspect."

"Am I?"

Rand smiled slightly. "What type of radio equipment do you have on board the Beverley?"

"The usual—ship-to-shore and short wave."

"Radio operator in your crew?"

"No, I handle it myself."

"All right," Rand said. "I'll be getting back to you later this evening."

Harry Rhine held up the magazine he'd been reading. "You're all a bit like Kipling over here still, aren't you? All this loyalty to the service, glory to the empire."

"Not really," Rand said.

"Did you ever read *Kim*? Damned good spy yarn! People today could still learn something from it."

"We would," Rand agreed, "if we were still fighting in India a century ago."

"What's this about India?" a voice chimed in. Sam Morgan had come to join them, carrying a glass of Scotch and a cigarette. "Let me say a word for South Africa. England

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fought a war or two down there too, you remember."

Rand backed away in mock alarm "Gentlemen, I'm hardly prepared to defend Britain's colonial policy of several generations back! Though perhaps we only anticipated what the Americans and the Russians sometimes seem to be doing today."

"Politics!" Monica snorted. "Here we are in the middle of an honest-to-goodness mystery and you three talk politics! I want to know if we'll be allowed to sail in the morning, Jeffery."

Rand winced once more at the name and said, "I'd like to have a meeting here later this evening—say, ten o'clock? Could you all attend?"

"Just the three of us?" Morgan asked. "Good lord, man, do you really think one of us killed that fellow?"

"We'll see," Rand said.

He left them together and found a telephone to call an unlisted London number. Hastings was on the other end, and they talked quietly for a few moments. When Rand hung up, Monica was waiting outside the phone booth to speak to him.

"Jeffery, can I talk to you frankly?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"The Argentine simply can't be delayed in the morning. We have some things on board which could cause trouble."

"Things? What sort of things?"

"I can't tell you that. It's nothing that concerns you."

"How do I know?"

"We've been friends a long time, haven't we? Won't you trust me on this?"

"I haven't seen you in nearly twenty years, Monica. A lot can happen to a person in twenty years. If you're running narcotics—"

"It's nothing like that."

"Whatever it is, I'd suggest you get rid of it. Dump it over the side. I don't know what's going to happen here tonight, but you just might get caught in the middle. That man was killed near your yacht, remember."

"I remember. Thanks for the advice, Jeffery." Her voice was cold, distant.

"Monica, there's nothing else I can do."

"What you need is a good woman," she said and turned away.

He watched her go. If it was a woman he needed, it would never be Monica Andrews.

Returning to the lounge of the Sailing Club shortly before ten, Rand found that only Sam Morgan had arrived for the meeting. The bearded South African was just finishing a

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drink, pacing the length of the room as he tilted the glass to his lips.

"Ah, Rand! I was hoping you'd arrive before the others. I want to speak to you in private."

"About this situation?"

He nodded. "And about that dead man. I'm not saying the woman killed him, you understand."

"Monica Andrews?"

The bearded head nodded again. "She or those women with her. I saw something a few days ago—too much, maybe. That's why Miss Andrews was on board my yacht when you came this morning. She wanted to find out how much I knew."

"What was it you saw?"

"Boxes being loaded on her yacht—maybe twenty boxes in all. Filled with guns."

"Guns?"

"That's right. The lid came off one box as I was walking by. I saw them. She and her crew are running guns to Northern Ireland. I'd bet my life on it!"

"And the man who was killed?"

Morgan shrugged. "Maybe he found out."

The others were arriving, and Rand was pleased to see Sir Charles Worthington among them. He'd called Sir Charles and asked him to delay his return to London. Monica Andrews came in just behind him, chatting with the American, Harry Rhine. Rand went to her and took her aside.

"If you have guns on board—guns bound for Northern Ireland—you're even more foolish than I thought."

"Who told you that?" The green eyes flashed fire.

"I have sources."

"It was Morgan, wasn't it? I was afraid he knew!"

"Monica, get out of this business before it's too late."

"What will you do about it?"

"Notify the authorities. Prevent you from sailing in the morning."

"You're too late for that, Jeffery. The Argentine sailed an hour ago, without me."

"What!"

"Of course you can intercept it if you want."

"Yes," he said, wondering why the decisions seemed suddenly to be closing in on him. "Tell me something, Monica. Did you send a coded message on your radio, mentioning my name?"

"Why would I do that?"

"Because you're the only one here who knew me. And I don't believe in coincidences. I don't believe there's another man named Rand who's going to turn up any minute. I

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don't—" He stopped in mid-sentence, staring at Harry Rhine. The American had taken a twenty-dollar bill from his wallet and was asking the waiter to change it into British pounds. Rand stared at Rhine, and at the money, and he knew what he had to do.

"I've called you all here tonight," he said, raising his voice and stepping away from Monica, "because of a very serious matter. As you may have suspected, my position with the government deals with more than mere yacht registrations. I am, in fact, a representative of a department of British Intelligence. My investigation concerns a matter of international security, namely the theft of a brief case from Sir Charles here."

Three sets of eyes turned to Sir Charles Worthington. "Are you what's keeping us in port?" Harry Rhine asked.

"My department of British Intelligence intercepted a radio message from one of the yachts in this harbor. The message, when decoded, contained my name, and spoke of delivering the contents of the missing brief case. I came here, naturally, just as I was meant to."

"Meant to?" Monica asked. "Do you still think I sent that message?"

"No. I know who sent it. I know who killed the man who stole the brief case too." His eyes passed over each of them in turn, and he felt a bit like the detective in one of those old mystery movies from the thirties. "You see, it was all a plot to make me think the brief case had really been stolen, when all the time it was safe in the hands of Sir Charles here."

The slim man's mouth dropped open. "What? What are you saying, Rand?"

"I'm saying that the brief case was never stolen, Sir Charles. You have it, and you have the missing pictures. The cipher message was a bit too easy, the mention of my name a bit too pointed. I was supposed to come down here on a wild-goose chase, while you delivered those pictures to the Russians."

Sir Charles Worthington's face was flushed with fury. "What in hell is the meaning of this, Rand?"

"Come along, Sir Charles. On the way back to London you can tell me why you had to kill that man."

Monica Andrews touched Rand on the arm. "Is that all there is? Am I free to go?"

"You're free to go," Rand said. "All of you are free to sail in the morning."

He left the room with Sir

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Charles. Outside, in the parking lot, Hastings was waiting for them inside a darkened car. "I got down here as fast as I could," he told Rand. "How'd it go?"

"Ask him," Rand said.

Sir Charles straightened his tie. "All right, now would you two mind explaining this foolishness to me?"

"There was too much activity," Rand said. "I was too visible. I had to pretend I thought the robbery was a fake, so our spy will go through with the deal to deliver the photos."

"You know which one it is?" Hastings asked.

"I know."

Monica Andrews walked quickly along the dock, heading for one of the darkened yachts. It was well past midnight, and no one else was in sight. She might have thought she was alone when Rand reached out to grab her, his right hand firmly across her mouth.

"It's Rand Don't scream." He removed his hand.

"What is this? You scared me half to death!"

"Where were you going?"

"To see a friend. I told you my yacht is gone. I need a place to sleep."

"You sleep with whomever you want, but don't mess me up. You almost walked into the middle of something."

"What?"

"Keep quiet and play along, and maybe I won't tell the British Navy about those twenty boxes of guns."

"You'd let me off the hook? For old times, Jeffery?"

"We'll see. Quiet now!"

She tried to adjust her eyes to the darkness, just as a figure came into view. "But that's—"

"Shhh!"

The man paused, looked around, then reached into one of the dockside phone booths to dial a number. He spoke only a few words and hung up. They waited.

Five minutes later a second figure came into view. He carried a paper-wrapped parcel under one arm. The two men met, saying nothing, and the parcel was exchanged for a large flat envelope.

"Now," Rand said, and moved.

From down the dock there was the sound of a police whistle. The two men parted, just as a pair of spotlights caught them in a crisscross of beams. Rand was running forward, drawing his gun.

One man, a stranger dressed as a seaman, turned to run. The other, hulking Sam Morgan, his beard glistening in the light, pulled a revolver free from his belt. He was bringing it up to

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aim when Rand slammed into him and both went toppling off the dock, into the black water of the harbor.

Hastings poured a double shot of Scotch and handed it to a shivering Rand. The blanket against his nude body offered some warmth, but it was the Scotch going down that really helped to revive him.

"Did you get Morgan?" Rand asked.

"We got him. And the other one who was bringing the money. *And* Sir Charles's erosion pictures."

"That's good."

"How did you know enough to watch Morgan's boat? Why couldn't it have been the woman or the American?"

"The whole answer was in that intercepted radio message," Rand said, "if I'd only been smart enough to see it. Tonight, watching Harry Rhine changing dollars into pounds, the answer came to me. No spy would be awaiting my arrival before passing the photos. It's more likely he'd be awaiting the arrival of the money. Agreed?"

"I suppose so."

"Pour me another Scotch, would you, Hastings? Monica, being British, might have said she was awaiting the arrival of pounds. Rhine, the American, might have been awaiting dollars. And what would Sam Morgan, the South African, be awaiting?"

"What?"

"Rands, of course—because the rand is the monetary unit of South Africa. Don't you see? The person who sent that radio message wasn't waiting for me—he was waiting for money. And he had to be a South African—Sam Morgan."

"I'll be damned!"

"Morgan tried to throw me off the scent by implicating Monica Andrews in some gunrunning, but that was just to cover his own tracks."

"We'll need you back in London as soon as you get some dry clothes on. The fellow who was buying the pictures might have some interesting connections at the Russian Embassy."

"Glad to oblige," Rand said. "What happened to Monica?"

Hastings looked blank. "She disappeared while we were pulling you out of the water. What's all this about gunrunning?"

Rand glanced at the clock on the wall. The Argentine had been at sea more than six hours. It would have passed the Eddystone light by now, heading for Land's End

"That's another story," he said. "I'll file a report on it when I get back to the office."

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LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

the first new* Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector *story in more than 13 years!

In QUEEN'S QUORUM (1951) we wrote: "Late in 1943 Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine had inaugurated a series of historical detective stories by Lillian de la Torre. These tales had as their protagonist the Great Cham of Literature, the Sage of Fleet Street, the jovial, Jovian Dr. Sam: Johnson who devoted his prodigious learning to the detection of Eighteenth Century crime and chicanery. The origin of the series is interesting: One day it dawned on the author that James Boswell—the immortal Bozzy—was in reality the greatest of 'Watsons.' Immediately stories in detective form began to shape themselves around every queer personality and dubious event in Dr. Johnson's lifetime . . . the author recreated that grand old gentleman-and-scholar in all his glory and produced . . . the finest series of historical detective stories ever written—in scholarship, humor, flavor, and compelling detail."

In his recent and excellent MORTAL CONSEQUENCES (1972), Julian Symons wrote that the Dr. Sam: Johnson stories "are perhaps the most successful pastiches in detective fiction . . . Miss de la Torre caught most happily the tone and weight of Johnson's conversation . . . [the pastiches are] certainly done on a high level."

The last Johnson-Boswell adventure to appear in EQMM, prior to this issue, was "The Banquo Trap," in June 1959—more than 13 years ago. Welcome, now, the return of Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector—and enjoy, enjoy! . . .

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THE RESURRECTION MEN

(as told by James Boswell; Spring, 1776)

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

"Body-snatchers and Resurrection Men, 'tis a scandal!" growled Dr. Sam: Johnson in his loud bull's mutter.

"Oranges! Sweet Chaney oranges!"

The call of the orange-girl rose, filling the theatre in the interval between the tragedy and the after-piece. 'Twas at the after-piece that my philosophical friend had taken umbrage, for it was announced as *The Resurrection of Harlequin Deadman*, a theme which Dr. Johnson considered both sacrilegious and inopportune.

"What are these mountebanks thinking of," he demanded, "to give us another dead man, when the whole town reeks with the grave and the vault, when ghouls and Resurrection Men lift our dead from the earth (shuddering) to be sacked and carried off by night, and carved like mutton by the Anatomist in the morning!"

"Oranges! Sweet oranges!"

The orange-girl was before us, a trim little piece with a dimple beside her bee-stung lip. I longed much to try her mettle, but set up there on publick view, so to speak, in a forward box at Drury Lane Theatre, between two weighty and well-known personages, I hesitated, and she passed on.

Dr. Sam: Johnson, burly and broad, his little brown wig clapped carelessly askew on his head, was known to every tavern and tea-table in town as Ursa Major, the Great Bear, the Grand Cham of Literature.

Our companion, Mr. Saunders Welch, tall, robust, and powerful, with his snowy poll and his round benevolent face, was recognized by the upper crust and the under world alike as the incorruptible Westminster magistrate, second in command to the Blind Beak of Bow Street himself. Often had the world seen him leading the procession to a Tyburn hanging, black-clad, stately on his white horse, bearing his black baton of office tipped with silver.

Nor was I, I flatter myself, unknown on the London scene: James Boswell, Esq:, of Auchinleck in Scotland, advocate and man of the world, chronicler of the *detections* of Dr. Sam: Johnson: very much at your

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service. Many an eye from the stalls was marking my elegant bloom-coloured attire, my swarthy visage set off by powdered clubbed wig, my genteel bearing and complaisant air.

"And what does Bow Street," my worthy friend was demanding, "to quell these grave-robbing scoundrels?"

"What can Bow Street do?" rumbled Mr. Welch. "These involuntary levitations of inhumated decedents—" He paused impressively, for he loved to outdo Dr. Sam: Johnson himself in the matter of sesquipedalian terminology.

"By which you mean, digging up the dead?" suggested Johnson with a half smile.

"Just so, sir. We do what we can to prevent it. The vaults are concealed, but the Resurrection Men find them out; coffins are sealed, but somehow come unsealed; guards are set, but the Resurrection Men prove stronger. They are persistent, for the traffick is very profitable. The Anatomist pays high for the fresh bodies he dissects."

"Too much of this," growled Johnson in revulsion. "Harlequin Deadman, pah! Let us go."

I had got my friend to visit the theatre by promise of a tragedy of a moral tendency, *The Distrest Mother*; and now it was over he was little disposed to wait for the harlequinade. But I found myself reluctant to leave my bee-stung charmer unattempted.

"Do, sir," I perswaded, "do sit on with us, for they say Mr. De Loutherbourg back stage has outdone himself with his scenes and his transformations, his opticks and his mechanicks, his grand effects of light and dark."

"Well, well, I'll humour you, Bozzy. Let us see what this Dutchman can do."

This complaisance enabled me to close with the pretty orange-girl, and privily purchase from her at an inflated rate not only a regale of oranges, but a rendezvous for a later hour at a bagnio hard by Covent Garden. I devoured my orange well pleased.

Suddenly, with a loud groan of the tuba, the musick banged up a grotesque dead march. Salt-box and cleaver beat time, and nimble fingers made the marrow-bones to rattle. Ropes creaked, and the scene-curtain rolled up in Mr. De Loutherbourg's new manner. The stage lay in darkness. All the candles, at the front and in the wing-ladders alike, had been snuffed. Only a large opal moon gleamed of itself in a black velvet sky.

"'Tis some chymical substance makes it glow," observed Dr. Johnson, his interest en-

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gaged, for he dabbled in chymical experimentation himself.

The dead march swelled, torch-light appeared, and a grotesque funeral procession stalked into view. The children of the company, inappropriately attired as Cupids, capered on first, scattering flowers. Harlequin's bier was borne on shoulder high, under a diamond-chequered pall. There followed his friends and enemies as mourners, Columbine in her gauzy skirts supported by the noted Grimaldi as Pantaloon, Clown with white-painted face wringing his floury hands, and the rest of the farcical rout. Dr. Johnson snorted. He hates to be reminded that man—even Harlequin—is mortal.

Harlequin under his pall was laid in his grave—that is to say, in the Cauldron Trap, depressed just deep enough—and the mourners footed it off to a quickstep. De Loutherbourg's opal moon precipitously declined and set.

In the dead darkness there was a stir. A sheeted figure, gleaming with a luminous moony glow, sat up in the grave. 'Twas startling. Ladies shrieked, men cursed in admiration. Then the figure straightened and stepped up, the glowing cerements were cast aside, and Harlequin stood before us—a skeleton! Every bone gleamed with that same mysterious moonlight glow, the palms of his hands shone, and where the face should have been shimmered the grin of a skull.

"Bravo, De Loutherbourg!" muttered Welch.

"Tschah!" said Johnson, "black body hose and bright paint!"

The musick struck up a weird melody. Wright was Harlequin that night, and his Deadman's Dance was a triumph of loose shank-bones and prodigious leaps. But Dr. Johnson, finding in it no moral content, could not sit still. When the foolery ended, we hardly stayed to hear tomorrow's bill announced *(Venice Preserved* and *Harlequin Cherokee)* before we escaped ahead of the press.

Outside the theatre, as usual, a mob of riff-raff was gathered, chairmen, link-boys, night-walking wenches, ready-handed rapparees, pimps and pickpockets.

Past us as we left the play-house strolled a youth who engaged my regard, fresh of face, erect of form, lace-ruffled, clad in ivory brocade. Striding easily forward, he came up against a knot of blackguards. There was a jostle. The boy seized a collar and shouted. I thought the word was "Mur-

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der!" He was fatally right. A knife flashed, the boy fell, the brawlers melted from sight.

"Halt!" shouted Welch, and gave chase, but in vain. They were gone.

"Zookers, my cousin!" ejaculated a flash-looking bystander in a bag-wig, starting forward. "He's in a fit! Quick, lads, bear him to the tavern!"

Several hands were reaching for the boy, when past my elbow sped a lady in rose-coloured lutestring, small and daintily formed, her grey eyes enormous in her pale delicate face.

"Stand off!" she cried, and the would-be helpers fell back.

"Patrick!" she breathed, and knelt beside him. He lay as the dead, no breath, no motion. She wrung her hands.

"My son!" she wailed. "What shall I do? He's dead as his father died, and the body-snatchers will have him as they had his father, and what will become of me?"

"Give place," said a resonant voice. "I am a surgeon, madam, John Hardiman, at your service. Pray permit me, milady."

He knelt beside her, a military-looking man of middle height. Soon he rose, shaking his head.

"Lend a hand here," he cried, "and bear him to my surgery in White Hart Yard, where I may apply my skill to restore him."

"Never!" cried the lady. "He shall go home, for my house is hard by. Summon a chair!"

"A chair for Lady Julia Fitzpatrick!" voices took up the cry.

"Who is this lady?" I wondered aloud. "And what means her talk of the body-snatchers?"

"Why, all the world knows Lady Julia Fitzpatrick," replied Dr. Johnson, "sister to an Earl, wife to the late Fighting Fitzpatrick, the notable Irish duellist. He died last year in a brawl at a tavern, and yon boy, his son, saw him fall. The tale they tell is strange. Fitzpatrick had, they say, his heart misplaced in his breast, an opponent could never nick it. You may imagine how the Anatomist would desiderate such a rarity."

"Preposterous!" I ejaculated.

"That may be; but preposterous or no, what the world believes, as I observed in the matter of the Monboddo Ape Boy, is a sharp-edged fact upon which a man may cut himself. So it was, perhaps, with Fighting Fitzpatrick. As the story goes, an assassin, instructed by the Anatomist, put a quarrel on him and struck the right spot, ending his days and producing the desiderated ca-

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daver. I know the Sack-em-up Men lifted him, for I saw the empty grave myself, passing by the churchyard of St.-Mark-in-the-Fields, with the coffin riven and empty and the winding-sheet thrown down beside. Small wonder if Lady Julia dreads the Resurrection Men."

"A shocking story!"

"It is so. And who knows? If Fighting Fitzpatrick proved in fact an anatomical rarity, might not the same Anatomist have a mind to have the boy on his dissecting table, to see if such misplacement runs in families?"

As we spoke thus, two burly bearers edged a sedan-chair with difficulty through the press. Many hands lifted the fallen boy, his brocades now blotched with crimson. The lady ascended the chair, received the inert form beside her, the half-door was fastened, and the chairmen heaved up the poles. The attentive surgeon walked beside.

"Let us go along," said my benevolent friend with concern, "for I perceive this lady needs a friend."

I followed along towards Covent Garden; but I had another kind of friend waiting in a bagnio there, and at Lady Julia's door in Russell Street I parted for the night.

Frustration ensued. My little Cytherean with the dimple, after all, embezzled my gold and left me standing, no doubt following some deeper purse to a more fashionable bagnio; and thus she passes from my story. I went late to my lodging in an evil mood, slept but ill, and rose to melancholy. Then when I called in Bolt Court, looking for the consolations of philosophy, Dr. Johnson was from home.

Not until evening did we meet. We dined together at the Mitre. I was silent as to the perfidious orange-girl; but over a mighty cut off the joint, my benevolent friend adverted to the tragedy at the theatre, and imparted something of its consequences.

"At my urging," he remarked with satisfaction, "little Davy Garrick at Drury Lane has consented to lay upon the shelf the resurrection of Harlequin Deadman as long as the publick is shocked by the doings of the real Resurrection Men."

"And what of the bereaved mother, Lady Julia?"

"Calling in Russell Street, I found her resolved that these ghouls shall not have the remains of Patrick. She fears that they may snatch him from the very house of mourning, and perhaps justly so, for certain it is, that it was a body-snatcher's trick, almost successful, when yon bravo in

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the bag-wig claimed kin and would have carried him off but for Lady Julia's arrival. She is made wary. The body has been shrouded and coffined, and the lid made fast, by her own hands. The wake is in progress, and in the morning the body will be consigned to earth, to be kept under strong guard while the cadaver is fresh. Pah! It destroys the appetite!"

My sturdy friend, falling silent, applied an undestroyed appetite to the demolishing of a toothsome veal pye. I lent a hand. Not 'til it was consumed did he lean back with a sigh.

"Come, then, Mr. Boswell, we are expected at Lady Julia's."

"What, sir, will *you* make one at a wake, and join in the pillaloo or Irish howl?"

"I will do more than that for a distrest mother."

We found Lady Julia's house decked in deep mourning. Sable crape draped the doorway and muffled the knocker. The door was opened to us by a sombre-clad footman with a pugnacious bog-trotter's face, and we stood in an entrance hall hung from ceiling to floor with rich mourning trappings laced with silver. From within sounded the low moans and loud howls of the Irish pillaloo.

"Dr. Johnson, Mr. Boswell, your servant!"

It was the undertaker, swelling and grand in black broadcloth.

"What, good Mr. Blackstock, sir, yours!"

The man was known to us, for we had met at Dilly's, under more congenial circumstances. Mr. Blackstock, the society undertaker, broad in the shoulder and short in the leg, had a face that reminded me of that pair of Greek masks, one broad grin alternating with a professional countenance of distress. He wore the latter now, mouth corners turned down and eyes turned up.

"A sad occasion, sir," he intoned; "and," he added in a confidential murmur, "a strange one. These Irish are too much for me! No expense spared on trappings of woe—" He glanced with approval at the costly velvet hangings. "—night made hideous by heathenish howlings—" The pillaloo rose to a loud keen, wavered, and fell. "No wax figure to display as in my father's time; no hatchment, no loved countenance preserved through my art; but shrouded, coffined and screwed down in haste, and hugger-mugger off to the grave in the morning! I'll never understand the Irish!"

"Lady Julia is apprehensive for the safety of the remains," remarked Dr. Johnson. "And

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she has cause, sir, she has cause."

Mr. Blackstock looked put about.

"Most unfortunate, that, sir, last year," he muttered, "but I did all I could, the usual guards at the grave, spring-guns, and so on; and so I shall again, with close supervision too. Lady Julia may make herself easy."

"I will tell her so," said Dr. Johnson.

Mr. Blackstock bent his weeds in a bow that would have done honour to an archbishop, and we passed withinside.

In a parlour hung with black, the coffin stood dark, covered with a rich sable velvet pall. Candles flickered at head and foot. Around it knelt the inferior Irish females of the household, tearing at their dishevelled locks and ululating with a will. Even ladies of the better sort moaned into their pocket handkerchiefs, and gentlemen stood by looking grave. A strong posse of rough-cut Irish footmen put about the consoling glass, and often retired to the kitchen, there presumably to console themselves with similar potations.

In all the hullabaloo, little Lady Julia sat erect, silent, dry-eyed and grim. To my surprise, Dr. Hardiman the surgeon had ingratiated himself, for he stood by her, gently smiling, with hartshorn bottle at the ready, and when her duties called her away, he supported her steps.

With doleful countenance, Mr. Blackstock tiptoed softly among us, distributing the trappings of woe. Elaborate "weepers," white bows fluttering fringe, soon adorned every arm. Rich mourning garments were passed out, black shammy gloves, Italian crape hat-bands, silk mourning scarves, and the finest of funereal cloaks, black broadcloth from neck to heel, and deep-hooded, to hide the ravages of tears. Tearless, the bereaved mother submitted to be swathed in a long black crape veil.

As the candles paled with the waning of night, the bearers shouldered the coffin and bore it out in the grey of dawn. At the door six black horses waited with the hearse, of carved wood black-painted, and surmounted by a sooty solemn crest of tall nodding feathers. The coffin was slid in. We mounted the mourning coaches, and the cortège paced off to the tolling of the church bells, bearing the slain boy to his resting-place in the churchyard of St.-Mark-in-the-Fields.

St. Mark is no longer in the fields, for the city has moved out that way; but the churchyard still extends alongside,

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massy wall, ivied lych-gate, solemn yew-tree, old grey tombstones, all very fit for our melancholy obsequies.

Of the funeral sermon, whined out with a snuffle by a pursy divine, I say nothing; but at last we stood by the opened grave. A wall-eyed sexton and his muscular helper stood by, looking, I thought, rather too pleased for the nature of the occasion; but no doubt they had been well fee'd.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust—" The first clods fell upon the coffin, and the sexton and his man wielded spades with a will to close the grave. I wondered how soon it would be opened in unholy resurrection.

The mourning coaches departed, but a knot of us lingered: the sexton, Mr. Blackstock and his men, Mr. Saunders Welch, Dr. Johnson and myself. We remained to observe as Mr. Blackstock took his measures for the safety of the cadaver. With his own hands he set the mechanism of a wicked-looking spring-gun. As the wall-eyed sexton stacked his shovels against the wall, still grinning, two rough-clad fellows took up their post by the raw grave. Each was armed with a blunderbuss; but they looked neither intelligent nor resolute. Would they avail to stand off the body-snatchers?

My gorge rose as I imagined to myself the horrid scene—the loose earth shovelled away in hurried silence in the dark of the moon, the rending sound as the coffin is riven, the pallid form torn from its winding-sheet, huddled by brutal hands into a sack; the chink of the Anatomist's coin as he pays off the criminals, his indecent satisfaction as he bares his scalpel and carves his silent victim like butcher's meat. No endeavour, no expense, seemed too much to avoid such a fate.

These gloomy reflections haunted me as the daylight hours passed in indifferent affairs. Waiting on Dr. Johnson in Bolt Court as twilight fell, I found that he had apprehensions as gloomy. Trusting as little as I to the abilities of the fellows on guard, he proposed that we should add ourselves, unheralded, to the churchyard watch. Sore against my inclination, but much by my will, I repaired with him to Saint Mark's.

There, unseen, we took up our watch in a corner of the ivy-covered church wall, where in a niche some by-gone vicar had concealed a chill stone seat in the yew-tree's dusky shade. Our mourning cloaks cloathed us from top to toe in impenetrable shadow. In the moonless night I dimly saw the

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shape of the fresh grave close by, where in silence the watchers passed and repassed like centinels.

As the hours rolled around, to my imagination the darkness seemed astir all around us. Vapours arose like ghosts and walked among the gravestones. Once I thought I saw a knot of cloaked figures flit through the lych-gate and silently enter the church porch. Once a black-swathed shape rose tall like a spectre behind me. My hair stood up on my head, and my tongue clove to my palate.

"Abate your horripilation, Mr. Boswell," breathed the apparition, "for I am no noctambulant, only your friend, Saunders Welch, come to bear you company."

We sat on. The church bell's solemn chime told hour upon hour. At the dead time of night, at last, a chaise drew up outside the churchyard wall. A moment later, dimly seen figures came over the wall, there was a stir by the grave-side, and we heard the whisper of shovels in loose earth.

"The body-snatchers!" I gasped. "What, sir, shall we not fall upon them?"

"No, sir. To abate this nuisance, we must take them red-handed. Let them dig."

Mr. Welch growled in his throat, but made no move. In the faint starlight, shovels swung. Piled earth rose. At last, we heard shovel strike upon plank. Then followed the shriek of riven wood. Hands reached down, and slowly the sheeted form rose out of the earth, gleaming with an eerie light. One of the body-snatchers cried out:

"Pah! Afraid of moonlight?" sneered a voice. "Off with the winding, man, make haste!"

Many hands tore at the winding sheet. The gleaming cerements fell away, and there appeared a thing of horror—not a body fresh in its youthful beauty, but a skeleton shining as with the phosphorescent light of decay.

There was a scream, an oath, and the Resurrection Men scattered.

"After them!" I cried.

"Be easy, sir," said tall Welch. "My men are ready for them. Come along."

Outside the lych-gate there was a confused scuffle, oaths, the sound of blows. As we passed through, we were surrounded by dark forms of captors and captured.

"You mistake me, good fellows," cried a resonant voice, "I am no body-snatcher, but Lady Julia's friend Dr. Hardiman, come hither in her interest."

"The surgeon! A friend!"

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exclaimed the Bow Street man who held him pinioned. "A likely story!"

"See," said the surgeon with a smile, "my hands are clean."

In that darkness it was hardly to be seen whether they were or no; but Dr. Johnson assented at once: "They are so. Unhand him, good fellow."

"And me," exclaimed another captive whose voice I knew. The starlight fell on the lugubrious face of Mr. Blackstock the undertaker.

"Mr. Welch!" he cried. "Bid these boobies release me, for I come on the same errand as you and the surgeon, to see to my dead-watch and baffle the Sack-em-up Men, and I desire you'll release me at once."

"Stay," said Dr. Johnson, "look at his hands."

"They are clean!" cried Mr. Blackstock.

They may have been clean of graveyard mold, but as tall Welch turned up the palms, they glowed weirdly in the dark.

"'Tis enough," said Dr. Johnson with satisfaction. "You are caught, sir, if not red-handed, yet with traces on your palms put there by Harlequin's chymically glowing shroud. You are detected, sir; you have gone about to rob your own grave!"

Other glowing palms told the same tale, and soon the whole squad of Sack-em-up Men stood detected. Among them, not at all to my surprise, grinned the sexton. Of course it was he who had disconnected the spring-gun.

"Bravo, Dr. Johnson!" cried a soft voice, as a black-cloaked figure emerged from the church porch. "Your stratagem has succeeded!"

Putting back the mourning hood, Lady Julia stood revealed, smiling and sparkling in the faint light that began to grey the East.

"Shall I have no credit?" A second form stood forth. I stared in disbelief—the fine eyes, the fair face—there stood young Patrick Fitzpatrick, whom I thought I had seen laid in the grave!

"I'm not so easy killed," the boy grinned at my astonishment, "more especially when I find a skilled surgeon to nurse my wound—"

"A mere scratch," murmured Dr. Hardiman. "And the heart's in the right place too."

"To nurse me like a friend," said the youth with emotion, "nay, like a father—"

"Which I yet shall be," smiled the surgeon, and the Lady Julia gave him smile for smile.

"So I mended, and 'twas but lying low for some thirty hours

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by Dr. Johnson's plan. Nay," said the youth with a schoolboy's relish, " 'twas a splendid bam! Building up a dummy inside Harlequin's gear, with my lady mother's wig stand for a head—and so trapping the villain that stole my father's body!"

The undertaker cursed to himself.

"And there—" The young voice hardened. "—there stands the scoundrel that murdered him!"

The body-snatcher he pointed to started back with an oath.

"I recognized him in the throng at the theatre, lying in wait for me, I doubt not. But before I could collar him, he nicked me and got away; and hence comes all the rest of this comedy of Dr. Johnson's devising."

"Retribution shall be exacted," said Mr. Welch. "Conduct them to the round-house."

"So, boy," said Dr. Johnson, "our task is done. Thanks to Mr. De Loutherbourg's chymical paint, which I had of Davy Garrick along with Harlequin's gear, Mr. Blackstock's villainy is detected. He will snatch no more by night the bodies he buries by day; and so farewell to the Resurrection Men!"

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a NEW crime story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

They met on a tourist junk in Hong Kong harbor—the lonely, vulnerable American widow and the man in brown with the beautiful British voice; the rich widow and the insignificant man who looked like a "nothing"... You can't see a ghost except in the dark. Or can you? You can't escape from a ghost, here, there, in Hong Kong, or wherever. Or can you?...

HONG KONG OR WHEREVER

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

The junk bounced gently between Kowloon and Hong Kong, heading beyond the harbor confines to the open China Sea on the far side of Hong Kong Island. It was just into twilight, the sky silky gray, lights spilling down Victoria Peak. I sat alone near the prow of the tourist junk on the lower deck. From the upper deck came the scattered, muted sound of talk, with now and again a shrill squeal as one of the women tourists glimpsed some unusual sight. Behind me there was the clink of glasses as the bartender prepared drinks at a gloomy little bar.

I was thinking: All alone. I didn't know I would be this lonely, what kind of a life is this? Out in Hong Kong, or wherever I might chance to wander, rich, free, and alone. Better if I had stayed in Evanston, Illinois, attending the odd class at Northwestern, knitting, walking a poodle. Except, Evanston was where Harry had died.

Harry, I said to myself, damn you to hell, which is where you've probably gone, you made enough of it here for me.

And then Harry was with me, there on the junk, standing behind me where I couldn't see his grin with its great spread of teeth and wet lips. I knew he was there, I felt him; these past few weeks I was always feeling him near me, following me. He

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was behind me with his great paw of a hand sticking out a fat finger ready to dig me in the ribs. I could feel the pulse waves of his laugh, a laugh like a bear's if a bear could laugh—*Huhh Huhh Huhh ——give us a hug Molly Baby a hug for Harry——come on smooch your old man!*

I sprang up from the long seat that lined the junk's side, walked rapidly to the other side of the deck, as far from Harry as I could. I didn't realize I was leaning over the side until the bartender called, "Missy! You sick?"

I drew back from the choppy swells and shook my head. "You want dlink?"

"Ginger ale, please," I said, and sat down to stare at the dark, cluttered family junks scudding around the jampacked community of Water People huddled against the Kowloon side of the harbor. Supper fires glimmered on their decks, laundry was still flying on ropes strung from the masts, high-pitched chatter was rising and floating away. Nobody alone on those junks. But the very thought of being crowded into the midst of such human closeness, sweat, hands, smells, bodies—no!

The steward handed me a glass of ginger ale, his face concerned. As I took it I saw behind him the man in brown. An insignificant man, shoulders hunched forward, head drawn into them, smiling apologetically.

"I beg your pardon," he said in a beautiful British voice. "If I'm intruding, just tell me to go away. But since we seem to be the only ones traveling singly on this trip, perhaps you'd like to talk a bit?"

His voice was hesitant, a mere shade from obsequious. He looked so innocuous I was certain he would be boring. But better bored than to have Harry's ghost creeping behind me on great padded bear feet, lunging, grabbing—*Got you Molly Baby give your old man a snuggle Baby!*

"Please, I'd like to talk," I said.

He sat beside me. Not close. I had been tensed for that, ready to scoot away, to make it plain I didn't care to be close to anyone. "I've just arrived from Calcutta," he said. "Wanted to see a bit of Hong Kong. First time back since I was a young boy, don't seem to remember much except for the harbor. You're American, aren't you?"

I nodded. Then became annoyed because he had decided what I was before I had told him. "How do you know? Have I revealed my flat crude accent?"

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"Oh, please. I meant to be complimentary. It's the way you look." He seemed gently amused, as though my flash of feminine temper was pleasing. "American women have a free, swinging way about them as though they own the world but have had it so long they're not aware of their ownership." He hesitated momentarily. "American men, now, they're something different." He slipped back into his obsequious expression. "But you'll have an American husband, so I suppose I shouldn't commit myself on American men."

I shrugged. "I'm a widow."

He ducked farther into himself, his shoulders reaching toward his face. It was really astonishing how much of a "nothing" he could become. Actually he was quite a large solid man. Yes, almost as large as Harry. But such a difference. This man so soft and gentle when he spoke. Harry almost maudlin with noise. "Terribly sorry," he said. "But of course I was much too general about American men. The British can be overbearing too. Perhaps it's just that we're not so open about it."

"Hypocritical?"

His laugh was understated, smooth. How delightful, how refreshing, how charmingly frank, his expression said. "Vulnerable spot, hypocrisy; so many of the human race share in it. Yes, you've caught us out, we British I mean. We're noted for looking bland, while feeling quite differently. Giving myself away, eh? Possibly we're annoyed at the American man *looking* as if he owns the world, when we're quite sure we *do* own it. Oh, look, watch that large junk skim past the harborline on the Hong Kong side. Quite a picture, what?"

Yes. Quite a picture. Exotic, entrancing. Which is why I was in Hong Kong. Before that, Singapore, Samoa, Australia, anywhere, everywhere, for the past six months, frantic to exchange the pictures on the inside of my mind for those on the outside.

"Fascinating," I agreed. "Tomorrow I'll see it all from Victoria Peak. It should be a beautiful panorama."

A young couple walked past us, the girl in bright yellow slacks and striped cotton jersey. She climbed out on the prow of the junk, beyond the seats, wrapped her arms around her knees, threw back her head to the warm gentle breeze. "You're braver than I am," the boy said to her. "Too close to the drink for me."

"Who thinks he owns the world?" I asked the man beside me. "That boy is American, but

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he sounds as mild as—" I stopped short of saying "as mild as you look."

"I do look rather like a nothing, don't I?" Not disturbed, merely quizzical.

I hesitated. "Well, yes," I said deliberately. "If you must go prying into minds you'll have to take the bad with the good."

He laughed again. Then, as though he felt he had gone too far, the laugh switched to an unctuous smile and he began pointing out places of interest. The only ones that stuck in my mind were the squatters' hovels, smudged in as dark shadows between the brightly lighted homes of the wealthy. Squatters without lights or water, clinging to the sheerness of mountainside and life, tenaciously refusing to give up. Why? I kept thinking, why endure so much just to live?

But I knew why. I was born in a Chicago tenement, Polish, and stayed there until I was 17. Four in a bed when I was small, cut down to two sisters and me when we grew too big for four. At 17 I quit clinging and climbed to a rented room with a hot plate. All by myself. Alone for the first time in my life.

Clinging is easy, it's the climbing that's hard. It took a lot of climbing to find Harry. The boss. The Big boss. Owned the downtown Chicago building—that and a lot more—where I ran the elevator. So I climbed to the mountaintop. And after a while all I wanted to do was jump off. But people don't. They hang onto life. Like Harry, reaching, motioning, the blood streaming from his mouth—

"You know a great deal about Hong Kong," I said desperately. Talk to me, keep talking.

"Not really. Only around the harbor, because as a boy I was taken sailing here and it's changed the least. The war came, you know. Japanese prison camp for the British, my father was a Navy officer. So they scraped up our family and tucked us away. Boring waste of time. Can't blame the Japanese, though. We would have done the same to them. But this must sound like ancient history to you."

"I've read books," I said. "But in case you're wondering how old I am, I'm thirty-one." None of his business, why had I bothered to tell him? Nobody's business about me. Especially that of men who might be eager to comfort a lonely vulnerable widow. And her money.

"I was thirteen when I went to prison camp," he said. "Look, you'll find this section

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interesting, it's quite famous. Aberdeen, the main settlement of the Water People in Hong Kong. Perhaps you'll want to get out a bit of change, they'll be begging around our junk as we near the restaurant."

Ahead the gaudy lights of the Floating Restaurants sparked the dusky sky. Sampans darted from the protecting flanks of the family junks, skimmed toward the tourist junk. Women and children called out, voices high-pitched and nasal, hands pleading upward. I felt in my purse, found coins, tossed them. But the throw was too high and the coins fell into the dark sea.

The children screamed at me, their faces incensed by this foolish loss. Their anger struck me like a blow, a reminder of impoverished childhood when a lost penny was tragedy. But more than that, a reminder of fate. My aim was always missing its mark. Like with Harry. So rich, so glamorous with possessions. Fat even became him when he was 35 and I was 19.

"Shall we dine together?" the man in brown asked, very formally.

A fleeting wish crossed my mind to be in evening dress, in a beautiful supper club, a sparkling place for lovely clothes and happiness, instead of nothing ahead except eating a Chinese dinner with a stranger.

"Perhaps we can do i another time, I would like tha too," the man in brown sai gently.

I stared, mouth parted. Hi eyes probed mine. Strange eyes pale blue, unreadable as though under a sheath of glass. It wa an effort to turn away. I leane over the railing, but the crie and reaching hands in th sampans whirled me bacl toward the man.

Our junk bumped against th gangway of the lighted restau rant. The man in brown tucke his hand under my arm, helpe me up the gangway, and led m to a large round table where tourists were already being seated. In desperation I struck up a conversation with a friendly couple from Indiana anything to avoid the man beside me. Finally he touche my arm. I turned.

"Forgive me, I realize I'm often disturbing. But"—and he shrugged—"I can't rid myself o this ability to read minds any more than I can rid myself o my arm. Short of cutting of the arm, of course, or getting a lobotomy for my brain. But too drastic, don't you think? Besides, reading minds is a great aid to me. I'm a professional analyst, a clinical psychologist In industry. And to do a bit o mind reading saves time."

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I willed my own mind to go blank. But it bubbled like a seething cauldron, as though his gaze was a stirring spoon, digging at its bottom, bringing lost thoughts to the surface.

"Would you rather I went away?"

"Yes," I said.

"After I finish dinner." The cringing set of his shoulders became pronounced, but his eyes were amused. "I'm very hungry."

I wasn't. The strange fish things which had started as delicious now tasted like the harbor, defiled by those thousands of crowded, screaming, born-and-die people in those thousands of junks. I began to think of the catfish Harry had brought me when we went to his Ozark fishing lodge on our honeymoon; how he held the revolting thing before my face, pushing it at me to hear me scream, grinning at me—both Harry and the fish—the fish with rubbery spikes around its mouth ready to stab me.

That was the first time I had noticed how big and yellow Harry's teeth were, how his breath as he laughed at me spewed the smell of cigars he continually chewed. He actually put the catfish on my arm, only to tease me he said later. Because I had fainted.

"Are you ill?" It was the friendly woman from Indiana, her face concerned. I realized then that my eyes were frozen into a stare, looking inward. I shook my head. "No, it's just I don't care much for fish."

After the fruit was served, the man in brown excused himself. Soon we all left for the return to Kowloon. Our junk slid past new housing projects for workers, the huge buildings like enormous henneries with the lights left on to make the hens lay more. People, and more a-borning, stacked layer on layer, my God! The closeness, the intolerable intimacy!

Then I heard, unmistakably, a voice. Not outside. Inside. A voice that kept asking: Why are you frightened, why are you frightened? Over and over. But it wasn't my inner voice. It was British, insinuating, the voice of the man in brown worming into the crevices of my mind where he had no business to be. I whirled, expecting to see him behind me.

But he was on the opposite side of the deck, looking toward the dark open sea spotted with the speeding lights of small boats. For a sickening instant I wished Harry were back, booming, pawing Harry as a buffer against this mind-reading stranger. Like a cannon set off in a prayer room, Harry

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was. I could never think when he was in a room with me. Only when he left it.

The junk slipped into the Kowloon wharf. I hurried through the streets, past cooking cauldrons on the sidewalks where Chinese waited for late-night suppers, into the gaudy shopping district with stores still open, merchants hawking wares to the crowds walking up and down. It was late, but nobody bothered me. Except for staring.

Perhaps I looked frightened. Perhaps that made them stare. Except that men—even women, but in a different way—always stared at me. Harry did, all the years we were married. *Molly Baby the way you look is really something I really bought me a Baby Doll I did——don't kid your old man Molly it was money not love give us a kiss.* Grab, pull, snatch. Of course he had the right. That's what Harry and the law said. He was my husband. *Baby I could drown in those smoky dark eyes you got lips like rose petals.* Almost twelve years.

"I belong to myself, why couldn't you understand that!" I said to myself.

But I must have said it out loud. "I quite understand. Of course you do," a British voice said behind me.

I whirled. The man in brown—he hadn't yet told me his name, nor had I told mine—was smiling at me. "One does not give away, easily, a valuable possession."

"Why are you following me?"

"I'm sorry." Obsequious again. "Really I wasn't following you. My hotel's this way. And you're headed in my direction, possibly going to the same hotel. Tell you what, we'll exchange places. I'll walk ahead and you follow. Very oriental."

He bowed slightly, went around me, and walked toward the tall hotel, with the Sikh doorman pacing in front of it. It was the first time I became aware of his back. I hadn't noticed it before, only his meek, fawning face. Seen from the front, his shoulders seemed bent in a half bow. But from the back they were massive, hugely muscled, bent forward by their weight and power. His arms were extraordinarily long. They swung loosely, ending in great blobs of hands.

From the back he looked like Harry. A great hulking bear of a man. No, no, he couldn't be! He couldn't be possessed by Harry, motivated by a dead man. He was a stranger, he came from Calcutta, how could Harry have found him—or could he? Ghosts have no barriers.

At the hotel entrance the

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ıan turned, looked back riefly, his milk-toast face miling. No. Not Harry.

The next morning was ɔvely, shining. I forgot the reams and tremors of the night efore. I felt like a child in an musement park as the cable ar climbed steep Victoria Peak, iving a slant-visioned view of Iong Kong below. I'm happy, 'm having fun, why shouldn't I e happy, I was thinking as I ɛft the cable car at the top of he peak.

It was a different suit, this ime tan with brown overplaid. ʃut the same strange, hulking nan, buying picture postcards rom a woman vendor. Follow- ng me! No, he had come ahead, ıad been waiting for me, nowing I was coming—I had aid so the night before.

I hurried past him, looking traight ahead. When I was a ɔod distance away, out on a edge where a spyglass was ɔlaced for viewing the harbor, I urned.

His back was toward me. And it had been no night trick ɔf vision. He did look like Iarry, his back massive, its ıunch predatory, the muscles ɛearly defined even in well- ailored coat sleeves. His figure rew larger and larger, pushing ɔut the air and space until I was ɔreathless. I hurried, almost unning, past him and the souvenir stand toward the tour bus that was waiting.

Next stop, the Tiger Balm Gardens. Hideous, demonic. Filled with grotesque figures caught in still-life agonies, materialized from the demons who sometimes hovered over me in the dark as I tried to sleep. Tortuous stairways winding into hot balconies that led into other stairways seeming to go nowhere.

And on one of the stairways I felt Harry behind me. Perspiration ran cold down my back. My skin crawled with the knowledge that Harry's great ghost hands hovered above my shoulders, ready to pull me toward him. I turned, hands spread to push him away.

The British stranger stood at the foot of the stairs, looking up, smiling.

I ran up the stairs, across a balcony, down another stairway, crossed an open space to another flight. When I was halfway up, the stranger came in view, started down. I went backward, stumbled. His arm reached forward, grotesquely long, his fingers open, grasping. He caught my head, steadied me. Smiling gently.

He said, "Why are you frightened? Are you ill? You do look ill, perhaps it is too warm for you, you're not used to the tropics."

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I pulled my hand free, pressed against the stairway's wall.

"Surely you're not frightened of me, obviously I'm a harmless sort of chap. Even though it's true, yes, I did come on this tour today because you said you would be on it. But nothing frightening about that, why blame a man for wanting to be better acquainted with a woman so—fascinating." Gentle. Talking softly, as though I were a horse to be gentled. I had heard the groom talk that way to Harry's thoroughbreds when we were in Kentucky.

"I—I'm not frightened. It's—you read minds. It isn't normal to read minds."

"Oh, yes." He nodded. "Difficult to be around that trait in this day and age. Perhaps in future, when everyone does it, it will be easier. Force a new morality. You know, evil thoughts will become evil deeds. Or perhaps they do even now. But, my dear, a lovely creature like you shouldn't worry about thoughts. You'll be forgiven, you know."

He took my hand again. I trembled, but I let it stay. "Such a lovely girl, but lovelier if you were not troubled. You're unique, you know. Outwardly the exquisite stillness of a Greek statue. Bu inwardly a trapped bird, flutte ing, seeking escape. Fro what?"

Prying, probing! I jerke away. "Do you intend to follo me until I leave Hong Kong?

"Well"—an oblique smile "if I do you'll have no escape will you? That is, if I truly rea minds. I'll know where yo plan to be. So why not b friendly and enjoy this brie stay in Hong Kong? You'll b leaving tomorrow."

I hadn't told him I would. hadn't even told the hotel. had only told myself thi morning on Victoria Peak whe I first saw him.

"Why not have dinner wit me tonight? In some unusua place, something very posh an oriental. I'm staying at you hotel. Samuels is my name Francis Samuels, Mrs. Sanders.'

That wasn't mind reading it's simple to discover names i a hotel.

I nodded agreement. Bette to know where he was than t feel him hulking after me like nemesis. "Dinner then. Now please, I'm going back to m bus."

At the bus I turned. Samuel was on an upper balcony; hi huge hateful back toward me blended into the Tiger Balm Gardens, a gargoyle among gargoyles.

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The bus was empty of tourists, they were still occupied with the Gardens. The bus driver stood outside, talking with other drivers. But I wasn't alone. Harry was waiting for me. I felt his great hams of legs settle beside me. I couldn't see his hand—you can't see a ghost except in the dark—but its shadow moved on my knee.

"Go away, Harry," I said. "For God's sake, go away."

For God's sake I'm staying Molly——shows no hard feelings——God may give you a gold star for that lovey you're too pretty to be mad give us a love sweetie.

Loud. The way he always talked. Inside my mind, hurting it, pummeling it with his laugh—*Huhuhuhuhuh!*

"You sick, Missy?" The bus driver was leaning over me. I became aware that my face was pressed against the window, my hands clawing at its glass. Despite the air-conditioned coolness I dripped with perspiration.

"You bettah soon," the driver assured me. "Next stop, Repulse Bay, sit under tree by watah. I call othahs soon."

But the soft breeze from the sea did no good. All I wanted was to get back to the hotel, go to bed—no, better still, pack and leave today. For where? Japan. Yes, Japan. Cool and clean, perhaps near Mount Fuji. In some small secluded inn where no one spoke English and, if they did, would be too polite to ask questions. I would hire a maid to stay in the room with me, to keep Harry away.

The late day flights into Japan were filled. I made a reservation for the following morning, took two aspirins, and went to bed.

Mollylovey gotchagotcha ——Harry's got his pretty little baby.

I swam away from Harry, under deep water, struggling for breath. Any moment the water would choke me, gurgle into my lungs. Then I would be helpless. Harry's arms would encircle me like an octopus, I would go down, down. Yes, I was down, down! With Harry's face pressed into mine, his eyes big and astonished. The water around us turned blackish red. One of us was bleeding. It was I, exploding from the water's pressure and Harry's arms. I gasped, made a feeble lunge—

I sat upright in the hotel bed, my heart fluttering and plunging. Then I saw the blood on the sheet. My nose was bleeding. I went to the bathroom, let ice water run on a washcloth, placed it on my neck.

Still half in the bad dream, I

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jumped at the knock on my door. I crept to the door, shaking, frightened.

It was a bellboy. He handed me a small translucent florist's box containing an orchid corsage. The note inside read: "Dinner at eight seems a good time. I will be waiting in the lobby. Francis Samuels."

Six o'clock now. Like an actor in a slow-motion film, merely playing a shadowy part, I began to bathe and dress.

I wore a white dress, sheath-slim to the ankle, its slit past the knee outlined in silver, the orchid at my shoulder. At first I didn't recognize Samuels, he looked so much like a waiter in his short white dinner jacket, his shoulders bent as though taking an order. But waiters in Kowloon are not Caucasian.

"How beautiful. As always." Fawning. "What a tragedy for your husband. To lose you."

"I lost him. He died, we were not separated."

"Yes, you told me." Very gently. "But surely his loss of you was the worst pang of death. He must have wished—but let us be happy tonight. I've looked up what I think will be a superb restaurant, a choice of several Chinese cuisines, would you like that?"

My neck felt stiff as I nodded. I knew what he had left unsaid: Your husband must have wished you would di along with him. Did you, Harry did you want to kill me?

The restaurant was shadowy the tables separated by filigree black and gold screens, th waiters in brocade Chines dress. Samuels ordered. Th delicate exotic food almos made me ignore his hulkin presence, simply enjoy eac delicious surprise. At the finis the waiter brought sizzling-ho candied lotus seeds, dippe them with chopsticks into bowl of cracked ice, and place fragrant servings on our desser plates.

"It was a lovely dinner Thank you," I said.

"We can have many more." So soft his voice, so insinuating

I tried to look at him squarely. Only my head begar to hurt, it was such an effort to outstare that bland fixed gaze "Remember, you told me yourself I'm leaving tomorrow? With all this world to move about in, it isn't likely we shall ever see each other again."

He chuckled as though I had said something adorable. "And you're thinking, 'not if I can help it.' My dear, you're so troubled and lonely. Besides being extraordinarily beautiful. You'll not be able to make it through life alone. You need someone with strength and understanding. And with—shall

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we say?—quite a lot of forgiveness in his nature."

"I like being alone."

He shrugged, smiled in a humoring way. "I've lived in the East since I was five years old. So by this time I'm quite Oriental, not much British left. Therefore I resign myself to fate. So, dear Mrs. Sanders, perhaps we'll share many dinners. Perhaps not. If not, I shall have to accept my loss."

He kept his gaze on me, holding my eyes until they couldn't leave his. He reached across the table and took my hand. "Terribly troubled," he said.

That stifled sensation Harry always gave me grabbed my breath, stuffed it back into my lungs, stale and poisonous, making me ill and giddy. It was agony to imagine seeing this hulking, probing stranger day after day, night after night. But worse, no longer a stranger.

I jumped up, ran out the restaurant entrance, down the stairs. I would catch a taxi while he settled the bill. At the hotel I would complain to the management, alert the hotel detective, hang up if Samuels telephoned.

A taxi crept toward me, held back by people scuttling back and forth across the narrow street. A big hand gripped my elbow. When the taxi came, Samuels assisted me into the car, moved in beside me.

"You're in no condition to go back to the hotel yet. Alone." He leaned toward the driver. "Drive around, we want to see the city."

"I'll call the police!"

"And what will you tell them?" Hateful voice! Gentle on the surface, but underneath coiling, ready to strike at my words. "That we had dinner in a restaurant, quite open to the public, and now are sightseeing in a public conveyance? A kidnaping? No, they'll think it is a lovers' quarrel, laugh, and wave us on."

Yes, it was silly. I knew that. All the man had said was "Terribly troubled." Then I ran.

"I want to go to the hotel. I must pack."

"This is your first visit to Kowloon, what a pity not to see it."

I looked out the taxi window at the people going up and down, in and out of stores, free to do what they wanted. Or were they? How many of those blurred faces really were like mine—pale and smooth, hovering like a mirage over the real face beneath. How many of those faces had a Harry who wouldn't let them alone, who used people like Samuels to keep them prisoners forever?

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"You are very frightened, and you need help," Samuels said. "As I told you, I'm a clinical psychologist. And I know you badly need a new security. Now, be sensible. A quirk of fate brought us together. Perhaps I'm no fonder of it than you are. It's not completely pleasant to be attracted by a woman who's running from a nightmare connected with another man. Even if she is beautiful. And even she falls into my line of profession." He patted my stiff icy hand. I drew away. Why didn't he add: Even if she is rich? There are ways of looking it up, he could have found out.

Neither of us spoke. Neither of us looked at the street scene sliding by. Finally he said, "Why run from your husband? He's dead. That's final."

He said he could read minds, I thought he could read minds. But it wasn't true. Otherwise he would know Harry wasn't final, that Harry was following me around, that there was no place I could go, Hong Kong or wherever, without Harry being there too. Making people like Samuels poke and pry and say terrible things.

I sat, congealed, and willed death. Not for me. For Samuels. Perhaps if Harry saw that he couldn't use people he would go away.

"You'll not die," Samuels said. "There's no use wishing you could die."

Stupid, stupid Samuels, wrong again. I never wanted to die!

"Take me to the Golden Emperor Hotel," I told the driver. "At once. This man is annoying me."

The driver turned, grinning, wheeled the taxi about.

"Sit away from me, you—" What terrible epithet could I use to Samuels? "You bloody fake!" Maybe he wouldn't be too oriental for that.

Samuels' face darkened. "Don't be ridiculous! Of course you can go to the hotel. Americans are so hysterical."

I slapped his superior smile. His hand flipped up. Then he sighed, dropped his hand, settled back in the seat. "Good thing you've no weapon in that pretty purse. Except perhaps a nail file. Although a nail file with the wrong emotion behind it can be nasty. Well, my dear, I'll not bother you any longer. Suppose I lost the knack of reading thoughts? You could be a widow twice over."

I swung the back of my hand against his mouth. My large sapphire ring cut his lip and blood spurted. One of his hands flew toward his mouth, the other toward me. But I already had the taxi door open. I leaped

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ıd fell on the curb. Someone ıcked me up. I pushed him ıide and ran. Anywhere. The rong way it was. But another ıxi took me to the hotel to ıce stares in the lobby at my ırt-streaked dress, its slit pped to my thigh.

Early in the morning I left ıe hotel. There was no sign of amuels in the lobby. I hurried) the waiting limousine, ırrified he might be waiting in . But I was alone, no one else as going to the airport.

At the airport I sifted the ıilling passengers down to each ıdividual to make sure Samuels adn't arrived ahead of me.

At last I was on the plane to saka. No Samuels on it, his ieek face camouflaging his ınging-bear back. Insinuating I ad killed Harry: You could be widow twice over. Harry had ied in bed, in his own omfortable bed, with nurses round the clock, the best ecialist. I even had an autopsy erformed. Harry had bled to eath of perforated ulcers. The urse on duty was in the itchen drinking coffee, she idn't come to help him. She id his bell didn't ring, that she ıought I was with him. Trying) wiggle out of a tight spot, ıe was!

He had bled too long. That's ll.

Give old Harry a hug Mollybaby little old kiss for Harry.

Harry was back.

In the vacant seat beside me.

I might have known I couldn't lose him. The polite Japanese stewardess ignored him as she handed me a pillow. Of course. She couldn't see Harry, not even I could. But I felt him there. His hand was creeping up my arm, around my shoulder.

I didn't scream. I know I didn't scream. I didn't hear myself scream, I would know, wouldn't I? The stewardess said I screamed, but it must have been someone else. I wish she would take that oxygen mask off my face, I'm having enough trouble breathing. It's the fog, there's fog in this plane, everything is gray, I wish I could swallow my heart, it's stuck in my throat.

Harry's going to kill me. I know he is. So I'll have to stay with him forever. It's revenge, he thinks I murdered him. "Harry, I didn't murder you!"

Molly you tough little rascal you watched me bleed——had me helpless in bed the nurse away kept telling me you hated me you wished I'd die——so I did Baby couldn't deny you anything Baby.

"I never touched you, I only sat beside you. Is it murder to sit beside a man who is dying

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from bleeding ulcers?"

Huhuhuhuh trying to kid your old man——got me bleeding then you ran out of the room.

"I took a shower, nobody can hear anything in the shower. Why didn't you ring your bell for the nurse? The button was beside your bed."

Who stuffed the wad of paper in the bell button so it couldn't ring——who picked it out while the nurse called the doctor——sure you killed c Harry.

The Captain's voice car over the loudspeaker of t Osaka-bound plane, first Japanese, then in English. " there is a doctor on boa please immediately contact stewardess. A woman in t first-class section is seriously and requires immediate ai This is an emergency. If there a doctor on board—"

"Q"

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Join the Black Widowers again . . . In this fourth recorded session the guest is brought by Emmanuel Rubin—one of Rubin's publishers. The publisher, Ronald Klein, had rather casually met a matchbook collector—and "thereby hangs the tale" . . .

THE MATCHBOOK COLLECTOR

by ISAAC ASIMOV

"My wife," said writer Emmanuel Rubin, a tremor of indignation shaking his sparse beard, "has bought another bull."

Discussion of women and, in particular, of wives, was considered out of bounds at the staunchly masculine monthly meetings of the deliberately named Black Widowers; but habits die hard. Mario Gonzalo, who was sketching the guest of the meeting, said, "In *your* mini-apartment?"

"It's a perfectly good apartment," said Rubin. "It just *looks* small. And it wouldn't look that small if she didn't have bulls in it made of wood, porcelain, tile, bronze, felt—of everything. She has them from an inch across to a foot across. She has them on the wall, on the shelves, on the floor, and suspended from the ceiling."

At the other end of the table, James Drake, chemist, said to Roger Halsted, mathematician, "What's this I hear about you rewriting the *Iliad* into limericks?"

"One for each book," said Halsted, with obvious self-satisfaction. "The *Odyssey*, too."

"Jeff Avalon recited the limerick to the first book as soon as he saw me."

"I've written one for the second. Would you like to hear it?"

"No," said Drake.

"It goes like this—

"Agamemnon's dream strategy slips,

"The morale of his troops

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quickly dips.

"First Thersites complains,
"But Odysseus restrains,
"And we next have the Cat'logue of Ships."

Drake received it stolidly. He said, "You have one too many syllables in the last line."

"Can't help it," said Halsted. "It's impossible to do the second book without mentioning the Catalogue of Ships and that phrase has three unaccented syllables in a row—a-logue-of. I leave one out by elision and say Cat'logue, with an apostrophe. That makes it all fifteen perfect anapests."

Drake shook his head, "Wouldn't satisfy a purist."

Code expert Thomas Trumbull, scowling malevolently, was saying to the waiter, "I hope, Henry, that you noticed I came early today, even though I'm not the host."

"I did, indeed, Mr. Trumbull," said Henry, smiling.

"The least you can do is give the act public approval after what you said about me last time."

"I do approve, sir, but it would be wrong to make an issue of it. That would give the impression that it was hard for you to arrive on time and then no one would expect to have you repeat the feat next time. But if we all ignore it, it will seem as though we take for granted that you can do it, an then you will have no troubl repeating."

"Give me my Scotch an soda, Henry, and spare me th dialectic."

As a matter of fact, it wa Rubin who was the host and hi guest was one of his publishers a round-faced, smooth-cheeke gentleman with a good humored smile. His name wa Ronald Klein. Like most guest he found it difficult to ho onto the merry-go-round o talk, so finally he plunged i the direction of the only man a the table he knew.

"Manny," he said, "did hear you say Jane had bough another bull?"

"That's right," said Rubin "A cow, actually, because it' sitting on a crescent moon, bu it's hard to tell for sure. Th makers of these things rarely g into careful anatomical detail.'

Geoffrey Avalon, the paten lawyer, who had been wieldin his knife and fork in workman like fashion over the stuffe veal, paused to say, "Collector' mania is something that seize almost every gentleman o leisure. It has many delights— the excitement of the search the ecstasy of the acquisition the joy of later contemplation You can do it with anything. collect stamps myself."

"Stamps," said Rubin, "ar

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ıe worst thing you can collect. hey are thoroughly artificial. 'est-pocket nations put out sues designed deliberately to ɛtch high sums. Errors, mis-rints, and the like create false ılues. The whole thing is in the ands of entrepreneurs and nanciers. If you've got to ɔllect, collect things with no ılue."

At this point Klein made his ay back on the merry-go-ɔund. "I met a fellow esterday," he said, "who ɔllects matchbooks."

"I collected matchbooks hen I was a kid," said Mario onzalo, the artist. "I used to ɔ searching all the curbs and leys for—"

Trumbull, who had been ıting in silence, suddenly ıised his voice. "Damn it, you unch of hack-talkers, our guest as said something. Mr.—uh—lein, what was that you said?"

Klein looked startled. "I said met a fellow yesterday who ɔllects matchbooks."

Trumbull's creased, bronzed ce turned to Klein. "What's ıe guy's name? The collec-ɔr?"

"I'm not sure I remember," id Klein. "I met him at lunch esterday—never saw him be-ɔre that. There were six of us the table and he got to lking about his matchbooks. isten, I thought he was crazy at first, but by the time he got through I decided to start a matchbook collection of my own."

"Did he have grayish side-burns, with a little red in them?" asked Trumbull.

"Why, yes. Do you know him?"

"Umm," said Trumbull. He finished his zabaglione and his teaspoon clinked as he stirred sugar in his coffee. "Tell us more about the matchbooks, Mr. Klein."

Klein looked around the table and said with a small laugh, "There isn't much to tell. I started the whole thing myself, as a matter of fact. We were at the Cock and Bull Restaurant on 53rd Street—"

"Jane insisted on eating there one time because of the name," interrupted Rubin. "Not so hot."

When no one commented, Klein continued. "I started it by lighting a cigarette while we were waiting for the menu, and then feeling uncomfortable about smoking. Seems there's a lot less smoking at meals these days. At this table, for instance, Mr. Drake is the only one smoking. I guess he doesn't mind—"

"I don't," muttered Drake.

"I did, though, so after a few puffs I stubbed out the cigarette. Only I still felt

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embarrassed, so I fiddled with the matchbook I had used to light the cigarette—you know, the ones restaurants always supply at every table."

"Advertising themselves," said Drake. "Yes."

"And this fellow . . . I remember his name now—Ottiwell. I don't know his first name."

"Frederick," growled Trumbull, with glum satisfaction.

"Then you *do* know him."

"I *do* know him. But go on."

"I was still holding the matchbook in my hand, and Ottiwell reached for it and asked if he could see it. So I passed it to him. He looked at it and he said something like 'Moderately interesting. Not particularly imaginative in design. I've got it.' Or something like that. I don't remember the exact words."

Halsted said reflectively, "That's an interesting point, Mr. Klein. At least you know you don't remember the exact words. In all these first-person narratives the fellow telling the story always remembers every word everyone has said, and in the right order. It never carries conviction with me."

"Never mind, Roger," said Trumbull impatiently. "This thing is important. Go on, Mr. Klein."

Klein looked even more uncomfortable. "I don't see it importance myself, Mr. Trum bull. There's really not much t it. This Ottiwell began to tell u about matchbooks. Apparently there's a whole thing about it t people who are involved. Ther are all kinds of factors tha increase the value—not onl beauty and rarity, but als whether the matches are intac and whether the friction strip i unmarked. He talked abou differences in design, in loca tion of the friction strip, i type and quantity of printing whether the inside of the cove is blank or not, and so on. H went on and on, and that about it. Except that he made i sound so interesting that i caught my imagination."

"Did he invite you to visi his place and see his collec tion?"

"No," said Klein, "h didn't."

"I've been there," sai Trumbull, and having said tha he sat back in his chair with look of deepest dissatisfaction

There was a silence. A Henry distributed the smal brandy glasses Avalon said, wit a touch of annoyance, "Don' stop now, Tom. What was th collector's place like?"

Trumbull seemed to return as from a distance. "What' Oh—it's weird. He starte collecting when he was a kid

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'or all I know he got his first pecimens out of gutters and lleys the way Gonzalo did; but t some point it turned serious.

"He's a bachelor. Doesn't ork—doesn't have to. He's nherited some money and has nvested shrewdly, so all he lives or are those damned match-ooks. I think *they* own his ouse and keep *him* on as a aretaker.

"He's got exhibits of prize ems on the wall—framed, if ou please. He's got them in olders and cases, everywhere. lis whole basement is given ver to filing cabinets in which he matchbooks are catalogued y type and alphabet. You ouldn't *believe* how many ens of thousands of different natchbooks have been manu-actured the world over, with ow many different legends, nd with how many different eculiarities—and I think he's ot them all, every one of them.

"He's got skinny match-ooks that hold only two natches apiece, and some as ong as your arm that hold a undred and fifty. He's got natches shaped like beer ottles, others shaped like aseball bats or bowling pins. e's got blank matchbooks ith nothing on the cover; he's ot matchbooks with musical cores on them. He's even got ornographic matchbooks!"

"That I'd like to see," said Gonzalo.

"Why?" said Trumbull. "It's the same stuff you can see anywhere else, except that on a matchbook it's handier to burn and get rid of."

Trumbull paused, then looked up and down the table. "Listen, you bunch of meatheads, what's said here is *always* confidential."

"We all know that," said Avalon dryly. "If anyone's forgotten, it's you, or you wouldn't have had to remind us."

"Mr. Klein will also have to—"

Rubin interrupted. "Mr. Klein understands perfectly. He knows that nothing said in this room is ever, under any circumstances, to be referred to outside. I'll vouch for him."

"Okay. All right," said Trumbull, "so now I'll tell you what I can. So help me God, I wouldn't have told you anything except for Klein's luncheon yesterday. I've had this thing chewing holes in me for months now—over a year, in fact; and having it come up—"

"Look," said Drake flatly, "either tell us or don't tell us."

Trumbull rubbed his eyes angrily. "There's an information leak."

"What kind? Where?" said Gonzalo.

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"I'm specifically *not* saying it's the government. I'm specifically *not* saying that foreign agents are involved, you understand. *Maybe* it's industrial espionage; *maybe* it's the theft of the New York Mets' baseball signals; *maybe* it's cheating on a test, as in the problem Drake brought up a couple of months ago. Let's call it just an information leak. All right?"

"All right," said Rubin. "Who's involved? This guy Ottiwell?"

"We're pretty sure he is."

"Then reel him in."

Trumbull said, "We have no proof. All we can do is try to block any information from getting to him, and we don't even want to do that—not entirely."

"Why not?"

"Because the problem is not *who* the guy is. It's *how* he does it. If we pull him in without knowing the method he's using, then someone else will simply take his place. People are cheap. It's the *modus operandi* we want."

"Do you have any theories?" asked Halsted.

"The matchbooks. What else? It's got to be. All our evidence points to Ottiwell as the leak and he's a crazy guy who collects matchbooks. There's got to be a connection."

"You mean he starte collecting matchbooks so tha he could—"

"No, he's been collectin them all his life. There's n doubt about it. The collectio he has now took thirty year a-building. But once he had hi collection, after he was some how recruited into the busines of transmitting information, h naturally worked out a schem that involved his matchbooks.'

"What scheme?" broke i Rubin impatiently.

"That's what I don't know But it's there. In a way, th matchbooks are perfect for th task. They carry message already and properly chose they need no tampering. Fo instance, the restaurant yo were in yesterday, Klein—th Cock and Bull. Its matchbook surely said Cock and Bull o the covers."

"Yes, they did."

"Well, now, suppose yo want to cancel a previou message. You just put one o those things in the mail, or jus tear off half the cover, and mai it. Aren't you saying th previous message was just cock-and-bull story?"

Gonzalo said, "That's pur bull. —Sorry Manny, didn' mean to raise a sore point —But look, Tom, anyone who mails a matchbook cover, le alone a whole matchbook, i

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asking for it. You spot something funny at once."

"Not if there's a plausible reason to mail matchbooks."

"Like what?"

"Matchbook nuts do it. They correspond and they *trade*. They send matchbooks back and forth. Maybe one guy needs a Cock and Bull to expand an animal collection he's putting together and returns a spare girlie picture for someone who's specializing in that kind of art."

"Ottiwell trades?" asked Avalon.

"Of course he does. I'm sure of it."

"And you never managed to pick up anything he mailed?"

A look of contempt passed over Trumbull's face. "Of course we did! A number of times. We'd pick it up, go over it with a fine-tooth comb, then send it on. Now, you know my field is codes and ciphers. You know I'm consulted by the government and have my contacts there. Naturally they're interested. They would be even if the leak involved only a case of over-the-fence gossip, and I'm not saying it's any more than that."

"Why?" said Rubin. "Are we that close to Big Brotherism?"

"It's simple if you'll stop to think. Any system for transmitting information that can't be broken—whatever the information is—is topflight dangerous. If it works and is being used for something utterly unimportant, it can be used later to deal with something vital. The government doesn't want any system of transmitting information to remain unbroken, unless it's under its own control. That's *got* to make sense to you."

"All right," said Drake, "so you studied the matchbooks this Ottiwell puts in the mail. What did you learn?"

"Nothing," grunted Trumbull. "We studied those damned advertising items on each cover and came up with nothing."

"You mean you looked to see if the initial letters spelled out a word or something," said Klein.

"If it was a six-year-old boy sending it, yes, that's what we would have tried. —No, we worked a lot more subtly and still came up with nothing."

"Well," said Avalon, "if you couldn't find anything in the printed matter of the matchbooks he mails, maybe it's a false lead."

"You mean maybe it's not the matchbooks at all?"

"That's right," said Avalon. "It could all be misdirection. This man has the matchbooks handy and he's a *bona-fide* collector, so he makes his

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collection look as prominent as possible to attract all the attention he can. He shows it to anyone who wants to see it—"

"I know what you mean, Jeff. He talked to Klein yesterday about the matchbooks; he'd talk to anyone. He'd show his collection to anyone willing to go out to Queens. That's why I asked if he invited Klein up to his place. With all that talking, all that self-advertisement, it wouldn't surprise you if he then used some device that had nothing at all to do with the matchbooks. Right?"

"Right," said Avalon.

"Wrong," said Trumbull. "I just don't believe it. He's the real thing. He's *really* a matchbook nut with nothing else in his life. He has no ideological reason to run the terrible risk he's actually running. He isn't committed to the side for which he's working, whether it's national, industrial, or local—and I'm not saying which. He lacks any interest in that. It's only the matchbooks. He's worked out a new method of using his damned matchbooks and that's the glory of it so far as he's concerned."

"Listen," said Drake, coming out of a reverie. "How many matchbooks does he mail at a time?"

"Who can say? The parcels we've intercepted have never contained more than eight. And he doesn't really mail them often, I have to admit that."

"All right. How much information can he get across in a few matchbooks? He can't use the messages literally and directly. If he tries to do the Cock and Bull bit to cancel a message, my kid nephew could spot him, let alone you. So it's something subtle and maybe each matchbook can work out to one word, or maybe only to one letter. How much can you do with that?"

"Plenty," said Trumbull. "What do you think is needed in these cases? An encyclopedia? Whoever is looking for information has almost all of it to begin with. There's just some key point missing and that's all that's needed.

"For instance, suppose we're back in World War II. Germany has rumors that something big is going on in the United States. A message arrives with only two words on it: atom bomb. What more does Germany need? Sure, no atom bomb existed at the time, but any German with a high school education would get the idea from those two words and any German physicist would get a damned good idea. Then a second message arrives saying, 'Oak Ridge, Tenn.' That would be a total of

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twenty individual letters in the two messages and it could have changed the history of the world."

"You mean this guy, Ottiwell, is putting across information like *that?*" demanded Gonzalo, in awe.

"No! I told you he wasn't," said Trumbull, annoyed. "He isn't important at all in that way. Do you think I would be talking to you about it if he were? It's just the *modus operandi* could be used for that as well as for anything else, and that's why we have to break it. Besides, there's my reputation. I say he's using the matchbooks but I can't show how. You think I like that?"

Gonzalo said, "Maybe there's secret writing on the inside of the matchbooks?"

"We tested for that routinely. If that's it, why bother using matchbooks? It could be done in ordinary letters and attract a lot less attention. It's a matter of psychology. If Ottiwell is going to use matchbooks, he's going to use a system that can be used *only* on matchbooks, and that means he's using only the messages that are on them already—somehow."

Klein interrupted. "Imagine my starting all this by merely mentioning yesterday's lunch. Do you have a list of the matchbooks he sent off? Perhaps we could all look at it—"

"And work out a code that I couldn't. Right?" said Trumbull. "You know ever since Conan Doyle pitted Sherlock Holmes against the Scotland Yard bunglers, there seems to be a notion that the professionals can't do anything. I assure you, if I can't do it—"

Avalon said, "Well, now, how about Henry?"

Henry, who had been listening gravely, with a look of interest on his unlined, sixtyish face, smiled briefly and shook his head.

But a look of deep thought came over Trumbull's face. "Henry," he said. "I forgot about Henry. You're right, Jeff. He's the smartest man here, which would ordinarily be a compliment, if you weren't all a pack of prize imbeciles.

"Henry," he said, "you're the honest man. You can see the dishonesty of the world without having it blurred by your own larcenous yearnings. Do you agree with me? Do you think this Ottiwell, if he were going to engage in this kind of work, would do so only by using his matchbooks in a way that would make them uniquely useful?"

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Trumbull," said Henry, "I agree with you."

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Trumbull smiled. "Here we have the word of a man who knows what he's talking about."

"Because he agrees with you," said Rubin.

"I don't *entirely* agree with Mr. Trumbull, to be sure," said Henry. "May I—make a little speech?"

"Go ahead," came from the rest in chorus.

"Thank you," said Henry. "I listen to you gentlemen on the occasion of all your monthly meetings with the greatest interest. It is obvious to me that all of you get enormous pleasure out of talking. But you are not as good at listening, so you may have missed a most important point. Since it is not my place to talk—ordinarily—I seem to have heard what the rest of you did not. Consequently, I would like to ask Mr. Klein a few questions. The answers may prove to be of no help, but there is a small chance—" He paused, then said softly, "Mr. Klein?"

"Yes, Henry," said Klein, a pleased flush crossing his face at suddenly becoming the center of attention.

"It's just this, Mr. Klein. When you began to tell, rather briefly, the story of your lunch yesterday, you said something like—and I can't repeat the exact words either—you thought he was crazy, but he made everything sound so interesting that by the time he was through you decided to start a collection of matchbooks of your own."

"That's right," said Klein. "Sort of silly, I suppose. I certainly wouldn't do anything at all like his deal. I don't mean the spying; I mean this huge collection of his—"

"Yes," said Henry, "but the impression I got was that you were driven to an impulse of collecting right on the spot. Did you by any chance pick up a Cock and Bull matchbook at the conclusion of the lunch? Perhaps to start your own collection?"

"That's right," said Klein.

"From which table, sir?"

"From our own."

"You mean you took the matchbook you had been holding and had passed on to Ottiwell. It was put back on the table eventually and you picked it up."

"Yes," said Klein, suddenly defensive. "Nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"Absolutely not, sir. We have matchbooks on this table too. But, Mr. Klein, just what did you do with the matchbook after you picked it up?"

Klein thought a bit. "I don't know. It's hard to remember. I put it in my jacket pocket, I

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think, or in my coat pocket after we got our overcoats."

"Did you do anything with it after you got home?"

"No, I forgot all about it. All this matchbook stuff passed out of my head till Manny Rubin mentioned his wife collecting bulls."

"You're not wearing the same jacket now, are you?"

"No. But I'm wearing the same overcoat."

"Would you look in the coat pocket and see if you have the Cock and Bull matchbook there?"

Klein vanished into the private cloakroom used by the Black Widowers.

"What are you getting at, Henry?" asked Trumbull.

"Probably nothing," said Henry. "I'm playing a long shot even though we've already had one this evening."

"Which is that?"

"That Mr. Klein had lunch with a man who turns out to be someone you've been stalking. Asking for two long shots, one after the other, is a bit much, perhaps."

"Here it is," said Klein joyously, returning with a small object held high. "I've got it."

He tossed it on the table and everyone rose to look at it. It said Cock and Bull on it and there was the small picture of a bull's head, with a rooster perched on one horn. Gonzalo reached for it.

"If you please, Mr. Gonzalo," said Henry. "I don't think anyone ought to touch it yet. —Mr. Klein, this is the matchbook that was at your table, the one you used to light a cigarette and which Mr. Ottiwell then used to demonstrate some points about the place where the friction strip is located and so on."

"Yes."

"And he put it down and you picked it up?"

"Yes."

"Did you happen to notice how many matches were in the matchbook when you lit your cigarette?"

Klein looked surprised. "I don't know. I didn't pay any attention."

"But in any case, you tore off one match to light your cigarette?"

"Yes."

"So that even if it were a full book of matches to begin with, there would be at least one match missing now. Since this looks like a standard restaurant matchbook, with thirty matches, there can't be more than twenty-nine matches in it right now."

"I suppose so."

"And how many matches are there in the book now? Would you look and see?"

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Klein opened the matchbook. He stared at it for quite a while, then said, "It hasn't been touched. It's got all thirty matches in it. Let me count them. —Yes, there are thirty."

"But you did pick it up from your table and you did think it was the matchbook you had used? You didn't pick it up from another table?"

"No, it was our matchbook. Or at least I was convinced it was."

"All right. If you gentlemen would care to look at it now, please do so. If you'll notice, there is no mark on the friction strip, no sign of any match having been lit."

Trumbull said, "You mean Ottiwell substituted this matchbook for the one on the table?"

"I thought such a thing was possible as soon as you said he was passing information, Mr. Trumbull. I agreed with you, Mr. Trumbull, that Mr. Ottiwell would make use of matchbooks. The psychology seemed sound to me. But I agreed with Mr. Avalon that indirection might also be used. It's just that Mr. Avalon did not quite see the possible subtlety of the indirection."

"Being too crooked myself to see clearly," sighed Avalon, "I know."

"By concentrating on his collection," said Henry, "and on his mailing and receiving matchbooks, he had you quite firmly pinned there, Mr. Trumbull. Yet it seemed to me that Mr. Ottiwell was not involved with matchbooks *only* in regard to his collection. Every time he ate in a decent restaurant, which could be often, he would be near a matchbook. Even if he were with others, it would be easy for him to substitute another matchbook for the one already on the table. Once he and the rest of the party left, a confederate could pick it up."

"Not this time," said Rubin sardonically.

"No, not this time. When the party left, the table was empty of matchbooks. This leads to some bothersome thoughts. —Have you been followed, Mr. Klein?"

Klein looked alarmed, "No! At least—at least—I don't know. I haven't noticed anyone."

"Any pocket-picking attempts?"

"No. None that I know of."

"In that case, they may not be sure who took it—after all, there were four others at the table besides yourself and Ottiwell. Or else they may think a lost matchbook will cause far less trouble than an attempt at retrieval. Or else I'm all wrong from beginning to end."

Trumbull said, "Don't wor-

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ry, Klein. I'll arrange to have an eye kept on you for a while. —I see the point you're making, Henry. There are dozens of these matchbooks in any given restaurant at any given time, all of them identical. Ottiwell could easily have picked up one or two on a previous visit—or a dozen, if he wanted that many—and then used them as substitutes. Who would notice? Who would care? —And are you suggesting now that a single substitute matchbook could carry all the information?"

"It would seem a very strong possibility to me," said Henry.

"But how would it work?" said Trumbull. He turned the matchbook from side to side between his fingers. "It's only one matchbook, just like all the rest. It says Cock and Bull on it, plus an address and a phone number. Where would there be any information on this one as opposed to others?"

"We would have to look in the exactly right place," said Henry.

"And where would that be?" said Trumbull.

"I go by what you said, sir," said Henry. "You said Mr. Ottiwell would be sure to use the matchbook in a way that would involve its unique qualities, and I agree. But what is unique about the message that matchbooks carry? In almost every case it is just advertising matter, and you'll find such matter in almost any number of other places from cereal box-tops to the inside covers of magazines."

"Well, then?"

"Only one thing is truly unique about a matchbook—and that is the matches it contains. In the standard restaurant matchbook there are thirty matches that seem to be arranged in a staggered set of four rows. If you study the bottom of the matches, though, you will see that there are only two pieces of cardboard, from each of which arise fifteen matches. If you count from left to right, first the back row—as you look at them with the flap open—and then the other rows, you can give each match a definite and unequivocal number—from one to thirty."

"Yes," said Trumbull, "but all the matches are identical with each other and with the matches in other matchbooks of the same kind. The matches in this particular matchbook are absolutely standard."

"But do the matches have to stay identical, sir? Suppose you took out one match—any one match. There would be thirty different ways of taking out one match. If you took out two matches, or three, there would

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be many more ways."

"No matches are missing in this book."

"Just a manner of speaking. Tearing out matches would be far too crude a method. Suppose certain matches had pinholes in them, or little scratches, or a tiny drop of fluorescent paint on the tips that would show up under ultra-violet light. With thirty matches, how many different patterns could you produce by marking any number, from none at all to all thirty?"

"I'll tell you that," interrupted Halsted. "Two to the thirtieth power, which comes to—oh, one and a quarter billion; that's *billion*, not million. And if you also marked or didn't mark the flap just behind the matches, you would double that to two and a half billion."

"Well," said Henry, "if you could give a particular matchbook any number from zero to two and a half billion, such numbers could encode considerable information."

"As many as six words easily," said Trumbull thoughtfully. "Damn!" he shouted, jumping to his feet. "Give me that thing. I'm leaving."

He ran to the cloakroom and was back fumbling into his coat and shouting, "Get your coat, Klein, you're coming with me. I need your statement and you'll be safer with me."

Henry said, "I may be quite wrong, sir."

"Wrong, hell! You're right—I *know* you are. The whole thing fits a few other items you don't know about. —Henry, would you consider getting involved in this sort of thing. I mean, professionally."

"Hey," shouted Rubin, "don't you go taking Henry away from us."

"No fear, Mr. Rubin," said Henry softly. "I find it much more exciting here."

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a *NEW* short-short by

LAEL J. LITTKE

Something odd, outre, curious, peculiar, unusual, unnatural, wondrous strange and decidedly out of the ordinary happened in the O'Connell kitchen. You'll hardly believe it . . .

A PUFF OF ORANGE SMOKE

by LAEL J. LITTKE

Bill O'Connell knew all about the way his wife Alice liked to have Paul Newman in the kitchen with her when she washed the dishes. He didn't mind. After all, didn't he sometimes have Raquel Welsh snuggled by *his* side as he drove home from work?

Everyone was entitled to his own private fantasies, and certainly a pretty girl like Alice must occasionally yearn for something a little more spectacular than an ordinary, slightly homely, not-very-tall guy who made an adequate but not fancy living in an insurance firm, a guy who was totally untalented except for a real flair for emptying the garbage.

Bill knew he was neither handsome nor suave, and definitely not the dashing romantic type. But Cortland Marshall was, and, confound him, he was coming through Los Angeles on his way to Washington, D.C. from his most recent diplomatic post in Thailand, an exotic spot if Bill ever heard of one. He couldn't blame Alice for being all agog over the fact that Cortland was coming to dinner. Cort had never married and liked to keep in touch with Alice, even though she had married. When he wrote that he was coming through L.A., Alice had written back insisting that he stop and visit.

So now the kids were packed off to Grandma's, the house was shining with wax and polish, the rib roast in the oven was giving off an aroma which could tempt any man to give up his bachelorhood, and Bill was cautioned to "be nice to Cort."

It wouldn't have been so bad if Cortland had been a plumber

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or a grocery clerk; but a man with a glamor job like his could set a girl's heart to thumping even if he was bald and hollow-chested, which Cortland was not. It had never been quite clear to Bill why Alice had married him—Bill—when she could have had Cort. But then she was the type who yearned over stray kittens and wept for starving dogs, and she said she fell in love with Bill because he looked as if he needed someone to take care of him.

The big question was, could that kind of love withstand the strain of Cortland showing up once or twice every year still obviously smitten with his old flame? Certainly Alice seemed perfectly happy—but what was it then that made her cheeks glow when she ran to open the door in answer to Cortland's knock?

"Cort!" she cried, and then giggled happily as Cortland engulfed her in a bear hug. Right in front of Bill. As if Bill did not exist.

"Alice, honey," he said. "You haven't changed a bit."

"Neither have you, Cort," Alice-honey said.

Bill had to admit she was right. He had been away almost a year this time, but his well-tailored clothes and close-cropped dark hair were as attractive as ever. And he absolutely oozed charm.

Finally Cortland noticed Bill. "Well, Bill," he said affably, "howza boy?"

Bill wanted to snap his teeth and snarl, but instead he pasted on a wide silly grin and said, "Fine, Cortland. How are you, buddy?" Immediately he felt like a clod, which was how Cortland always made him feel.

His duties to his host taken care of, Cortland turned back to Alice. "Tell me what you've been doing to stay so beautiful," he said.

Alice giggled again. "Oh, Cort, I've just been a housewife. Come on out in the kitchen and talk to me while I finish fixing dinner."

Cortland put his arm around Alice's shoulders and they walked into the kitchen leaving Bill alone with his bad thoughts. He wished that Cortland, in the time since Alice last saw him, had lost his teeth or his hair or something so that he didn't look like every housewife's dream of romance.

Not that he was afraid Alice would run off with Cortland or anything like that. Or would she? Even if she didn't, she might start imagining it was Cortland standing by her side each time she washed the dishes. Bill could put up with Paul Newman in the kitchen. But Cortland Marshall—*NO!*

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"Oh, Bill," Alice sang out, "come on in and join us."

You bet he would join them. He'd go in there and sit and watch and if Cortland got fresh with Alice he'd poke him in the nose. Or at least he would think about it hard.

"Bill," Cortland said as he walked into the kitchen, "we've just been going over old memories."

Bill wished viciously he could wipe out those memories. Or better still, wipe out Cortland. Just a flick of the magic fingers, folks, and poof, he's gone!

Bill flicked his fingers at Cortland and said aloud, "Poof, you're gone!"

There was a poof of orange smoke and Cortland was gone.

Bill stood in rigid silence for almost two minutes. Then Alice said in a matter-of-fact voice, "All right, boys, that was a nice trick. But dinner is almost ready. Come on back, Cortland."

Bill swallowed. "Alice," he said. His voice was a high squeak.

Alice went on stirring the gravy. "Bill, show Cort where he can wash his hands."

Bill tried again. "Alice," he squeaked. "I think Cortland *is* gone."

"Where'd he go?" Alice asked. "This is a fine time for him to go somewhere."

Bill collapsed on a kitchen chair. "I think I made him disappear."

"Well, make him reappear."

Bill shook his head. "I don't know how. I don't even know how I made him *dis*appear."

Alice stopped stirring the gravy. "Bill, are you sick?"

"I sure am," Bill groaned. His scalp felt tight and his eyes were so large he didn't think he could close the lids over them. "I've got to call the police," he whispered.

Officers Magee and Smithson were big, burly, and jaded. They had heard everything. Many times. Bill noticed, however, that they still had spirit enough to glance appreciatively at Alice.

"Sure," Officer Magee said when Bill had told his story. "You just flick your fingers and some guy disappears."

Bill gave them a sickly grin. "I know it sounds crazy, but that's what happened."

Officer Magee sighed. "Maybe we better search the premises," he told Smithson. "See if there are any signs of a struggle. Maybe he really did do away with this guy."

Magee looked again at Alice, who gave him a warm smile. Bill could almost hear the wheels in the officer's head grinding out,

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"Pretty wife, jealous husband, so goodbye, boy friend."

The two policemen conducted a thorough search of the house and back yard, poking around in the flowerbeds—for signs of digging, Bill thought.

"Okay," said Officer Magee when they returned. "Now tell us the truth. We're busy men, Mac. Our next call is a complaint about a billygoat who whistles *Yankee Doodle.*"

Officer Smithson guffawed.

Bill stood up and drew himself to his full five feet seven inches. He glared straight into the eye of his own reflection in Officer Magee's shiny buttons. He slumped down again. "I did tell you the truth," he mumbled.

"Well, tell us again," boomed Officer Smithson.

Bill licked his dry lips. "You see," he began, "Cortland was standing just about where you two are now. All I did was flick my fingers like this." He flicked his fingers. "And I said, 'Poof, you're gone!' "

There was a poof of orange smoke and Officers Magee and Smithson were gone.

Bill gulped. "Aw, come on back, you guys," he said weakly.

"Bill," Alice said. "Is that *all* you do? Just flick your fingers and someone disappears?"

Bill scarcely had the strength to nod as he sank onto a chair.

"I didn't know you could do that," Alice said with admiration. "You're quite a guy. No wonder I love you so much." She kissed him on top of the head. "I think I'll put dinner on now. Or maybe I should wait until Cortland gets back. When *will* he be back?"

Bill shook his head.

"Let me know when he gets here," Alice said. "I'll go put the finishing touches on the dining room." She left.

Bill wasn't at all sure that Cortland would get back. Or the two officers, either. He found himself wondering if Magee and Smithson had families. Maybe right now several little kiddies were crying for their daddies to come home. Bill stared bleakly at the spot where the three men had stood.

"I've got to turn myself in," he said to himself. "I'll call and tell them to come get me."

He wasn't sure just what he would say. As he waited for his call to be transferred to the police lieutenant, he tried to formulate something that wouldn't brand him immediately as an absolute nut. What could he say? "See, I've got these magic fingers—"

"Lieutenant Hargrove," said a gruff voice on the wire. There was a pause.

"Lieutenant Hargrove," re-

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peated Bill. There was another pause.

"I'm Lieutenant Hargrove," the voice said, a wary note coming into it, as if Lieutenant Hargrove were girding himself to deal with an addled brain.

Bill cleared his throat and considered hanging up. "Well, you see, Lieutenant Hargrove," he said, "these two officers came to my house to investigate a strange occurrence, and I don't know what happened to them."

Lieutenant Hargrove asked quickly, "Which two officers was that?"

"I believe their names were Magee and Smithson."

"Oh, those two loonies," said Lieutenant Hargrove. "They just called from Palm Springs. Said they didn't know how they got there. Couple of nincompoops. Get lost crossing the street."

Bill clutched the phone. "Palm Springs, you say? Are they all right?"

"Sure," said Lieutenant Hargrove. "Physically, at least. Say, did you get that strange occurrence taken care of?"

"Yes," Bill said hastily. "Yes. Oh, yes. Thanks." He hung up quickly. No reason to be thought a nut if everyone was all right. Of course there was still Cortland. But he would undoubtedly show up somewhere. San Francisco, maybe. Probably figure the State Department sent him on a rush mission or something.

Bill started to whistle. He walked to the mirror that Alice kept on the wall just inside the kitchen door. He *was* quite a guy, he thought, peering at his reflection. But he didn't look any different. He sort of thought he might, considering his newly discovered talent. And what a talent! Just let Alice's old boy friends come nosing around now. Just a flick of the fingers, and away they'd go. Even Paul Newman couldn't do that.

Bill smiled at himself in the mirror. Just let them come. He could take care of them. He flicked his fingers at his reflected image. "Poof," he said, "you're gone!"

"Bill," Alice said, coming in from the dining room. "I think we'd better go ahead and eat before the roast dries out."

She looked around the empty kitchen. "Bill?" she said. "Bill? Where are you?"

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"Without this knowledge how could I hope to be true to the past?"

THE METHOD ACTOR

by JEFF SWEET

A good case could be made for the idea that the television set has replaced the fireplace. Once upon a time, after a home-cooked meal, people would sit by the hearth, watch the flickering shadows, and listen to the sound of logs crackling in the flame. Now you'll probably find them in front of their portable TV sets; the flickering shadows they watch will be on a nineteen-inch screen and the only crackling they're likely to hear is static.

So thought Sergeant Springer, sitting in a worn but comfortable easy chair, sipping his coffee. His host's back was to him. This was not out of any intended rudeness to Springer. Lieutenant Robbins' attention at the moment was directed to his TV set in an effort to pick up something more than what looked like animated confetti.

He fiddled with the rabbit ears, he gave the side a thump with his fist, he maneuvered the various dials in a manner recalling Boris Karloff's laboratory technique. But in spite of all his manipulations the picture tube continued its confetti special.

"Damn!" the lieutenant muttered. A flick of the wrist and the screen went dark. "It *would* have to do this tonight," he said, turning to Springer. "You don't know how great a picture we're missing. *It's a Wonderful Life*—a true American classic! Frank Capra's best job of direction, Jimmy Stewart's best performance, and Lionel Barrymore at his orneriest. I see in the paper this morning that it's going to be on, I make sure I have no other plans, I invite you over for dinner, and what happens? Nothing! No picture, no sound—nothing!"

"Don't worry about it," said Springer. "We'll catch it the next time round, okay?"

"That'll probably be a year from now," the lieutenant groaned.

Springer smiled to himself.

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ere was the great Lieutenant obbins, famous for his unappable temperament whether acking down killers or on the itness stand facing a defense torney's cross-examination. nd here was the same obbins, his cool blown, his nflappability flapping—all beuse of some tiny transistor or shot tube.

Robbins flashed one last ccusing glance at the set, then ropped into his chair. Reachng for his coffee he noticed his nopened mail sitting under the V. listings. Methodically he ore open the end of an nvelope and extracted the ontents. "Nothing like a letter ddressed to Occupant to einforce your sense of identity," he noted sardonically. He icked up the next envelope nd his eyebrows raised.

"Something interesting?" Springer asked.

"Could be," replied Robins. "Does the name Carl Ramsey mean anything to ou?"

"The actor?"

Robbins nodded. "I saw him n *Macbeth*. Absolutely chilling erformance! I met him once, ou know. He was always a tickler for authenticity in his ork. He got a part in a film as cop and came round to find ut what being one was like. I ad a long conversation with him—fascinating man! His mind was always working. You could tell from the intense look in his eyes that he never missed anything. When the film came out I noticed he'd picked up one of my own mannerisms for his part—the way I roll a pencil between my hands when I'm concentrating. I was very flattered. Oh, yes, he was one of the best."

"Was?" asked Springer.

"Didn't you hear?" said the lieutenant. "He died two days ago."

"Natural causes?"

"Oh, yes, no doubt about that. But it's funny . . ."

"What?"

"This is a letter from him, dated the morning before he died," answered Robbins. "I wonder why he would write me? Aside from an occasional Christmas card I haven't had any contact with him since we had that talk."

"Well, open it," said the sergeant. "How else are you going to find out?"

The lieutenant tore open the envelope very carefully and withdrew several sheets of blue stationery. "My God!" he exclaimed, a few pages into the letter.

"What is it?" asked Springer.

"You'd better read it for yourself," said Robbins. He handed over the pages he'd

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already read, and, as he finished subsequent sheets, passed these too on to Springer, who was soon as engrossed as his superior officer in the startling revelations chronicled in the shaky handwriting.

The letter ran as follows:

Dear Lieutenant Robbins,

I will die shortly. I know this. The knowledge lies within the very marrow of my bones. I shall not resist death, for I know that, should I by some miracle "recover" from my present infirmity, I would not have the strength to return to the stage. I do not have the temperament for the role of an invalid. I am an actor, and I am not truly alive without an audience in front of me, a set behind me, lights above me, and the boards beneath me. It is better to die than to live half a life.

I wanted to say that I still remember with warmth our meeting back in 1957. You were particularly helpful when I was researching the part of the detective in my film. At the time it seemed to me that you had a special appreciation for film and theater. It is because of this quality I sensed within you that I have decided to tell you something of myself I have told no other man.

Perhaps you remember my performance as the killer in Lawrence Anthony's *And Fo to Go* back in 1967? T character I played was homicidal maniac who strangl a number of people on trans-Atlantic ocean liner.

I don't mind telling you th initially I had great difficulti with the role. Oh, technically could interpret the lines wi the expected superficial cor petence. Dependability, aft all, *is* the hallmark of tl professional. I'm sure that t most people sitting out front would have been a perfect acceptable performance.

But, as an actor, I alwa believed my prime responsibi ity was to myself. If I weren totally satisfied with my worl the most enthusiastic audienc response meant little. Such wa the case during the rehears and previews of *And Four t Go*. Inside myself my wor simply did not ring true. As spoke Mr. Anthony's words could hear a little voice in th back of my mind crying "Liar! I felt I was not truly playing th part. I was playing *at* it.

The dilemma was a simpl one. I was to appear in the rol of a murderer. Yet what *rea* knowledge did I have of th way a murderer's mind works Without this knowledge hov could I hope to be true to th part?

Desperately I tried to com

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ensate. I read Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* cover to over at least four times. I sat in n a murder trial and spent the ntire session watching the ccused. I even broke a elf-imposed rule never to vatch television and caught an nstallment of David Susskind's how featuring three residents of death row, a hardhat, and a abbi discussing Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood.* None of hese gave me an answer.

Now, it is one of the truisms of the Method school of acting hat if you want to know what t feels like to kill, you should quite deliberately, with malice forethought, stalk and kill a fly. Perhaps this indeed works for some actors. But as for myself, killing a fly taught me only what it feels like to kill a fly. This might conceivably have been of some value had I been cast in an adaptation of the Grimms' fairy tale about the tailor who claimed to kill "seven at one blow." But the character I was playing dealt with bigger quarry.

And so, I finally decided, must I.

I had nothing against Mr. Edgar Fielding. Nor for that matter had I anything *for* him. I had never met that gentleman before, and, in fact, learned his name only the next day in the papers. But any artistic endeavor exacts its price, and, as Fate had it, the price for mine was Mr. Fielding. It was a fact I fear he did not fully appreciate when I told him of it. But then, perhaps I do him an injustice, for I did not give him much time to think on it. He did not put up much of a fight.

That night I filled a dozen pages in my notebook, analyzing the various sensations I had observed as my hands had separated Mr. Fielding from this world. I drew parallels between this experience and the scenes in which the murderer in the play did his mischief.

The success of my efforts can be gleaned from the universally ecstatic praise I received from the critics. If I recall correctly, one said it was the most haunting performance he'd seen since Ronald Colman's in *A Double Life.* But I am immodest.

And Four to Go settled into a two-year run, and I played every show. Occasionally, as sometimes happens in a long run, I found the character slipping away from me again. Nothing if not a conscientious actor, I would refresh my interpretation with additional employment of my unique technique.

I was particularly touched by one young lady I encountered who, recognizing me before I

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could make my intention known, asked me for my autograph. At first I hesitated to oblige her. I feared that if it were found on her body the next morning, it would lead the police to my door. But then I saw how much it meant to her, so I relented. I signed a five-by-seven still I happened to have on me, gave it to her, and she went on her way. I found a successor to Mr. Fielding elsewhere that evening.

Ah, but the time passes and I have still other notes to compose before the end comes. I will leave word to have this letter sent to you after I have faced that final curtain.

Goodbye, my friend,

Carl Ramsey

Springer sat in stunn silence for several seconds. I looked across the room at tl lieutenant.

Robbins shook his head. new thought hit him, and i arrival was reflected in tl quizzical expression that can over his face.

"What?" asked Springer.

"I was just remembering or of his other performances, Robbins replied. "He w brilliant. It was in a dramatiz tion of Gogol's *Diary of Madman.*"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

his is the 376th "first story" to be published by Ellery ueen's Mystery Magazine . . . an odd story about, to quote e author, "the odd morphology of regret" . . .

The author, Luna Wolf, was born in 1923 in Antwerp, elgium, of Austrian parents; so her childhood was ilingual—German, French, and Flemish. She added a fourth nguage, English, when her family moved to the United States 1939. She studied music for many years, but she learned iat her talent did not match her aspirations, and eventually ie "drifted" into New York publishing. It was through her liting work that she met her husband-to-be, an "English lassicist," at a literary conference in Kentucky. "We iscovered a common liking for wine and mysteries, and greed that the detective story was now taking much of the oad once carried by the classic novel." (Hear, hear!) "I have tarted a mystery novel in which the detective is an editor." Hear, hear!) Right on! . . .

EVERYBODY LIKED FLORINDA

by LUNA WOLF

met Florinda soon after we moved to Texas. She was the ly person I really noticed at e first faculty party we ended in Austin. You uldn't fail to notice Florinda he was the ugliest woman ere, with her wiry black hair king out in all directions, her avy brows above small sharp es, her squashed-up nose, r yellowish splotched skin. In fact she looked like Beethoven, only worse. Her tall big-boned body was without shape or grace and her taste in clothes was appalling.

But she had a presence, a forceful presence. Without being aggressive her personality oozed out at you, lapped over you. And it wasn't her intelligence. She had a good mind, but it was practical,

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down-to-earth, not at all intellectual. She was very good at figures and that's what her job was. She'd risen fairly high in the university's administration, handling budgets and other financial matters.

For some reason Florinda took to me. Perhaps it was my lostness and shyness, for she was a genuinely kind person. At that party, for instance, I'd soon given up on the small talk, dropped my stiff smile, and retired to a quiet corner with a drink. I hate all parties, particularly faculty ones, and this one, so full of strangers, was harder to bear than most.

My husband had just been appointed Chairman of the Department of Comparative Literature and had persuaded me that he could not afford to turn down the opportunity. To go from an assistant professorship in a small Maine college to the chairmanship of a big department at an important state university was, he had insisted, a once-in-a-lifetime chance. We could still spend summers in Maine at our beautiful Eighteenth Century farm, and in Texas I could garden most of the rest of the year.

But I had hated it from the start. I hated the bugs and the snakes, I hated the people with their tritone vowels and false friendliness, I hated the climat I hated the overbig sky, an most of all I hated the flat gra landscape. No flowers. N color.

"Wait till spring," I was tol "when the bluebonnets are ou Whole fields of them—the mo beautiful sight in the world."

Maybe, I had thought, bu who can stand this drabness a the rest of the year?

When Florinda saw m sitting alone in a corner n even trying to look bright an more, she came over and s down next to me. Conversir with her proved surprising easy and after a short while found myself talking qui freely. Before long she pron ised to take me around Aust and show me the stores and w even made a lunch date for th following week.

And so Florinda sort of toc charge of me. Therefore it w quite natural, when I decide after a few months that I rather have a job than sper endless days by myself at hom that I asked for her help. M qualifications were few. N steno, typing, or other "offi skills." The only skill I had w editing. I'd been in publishi before marriage and since the had continued to do a occasional freelance job for m old Boston firm.

But Florinda managed

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ıd me a job, and one that ted my qualifications quite ·ll: to write, rewrite, or edit ɜ press releases, speeches, and cuments that came out of the ıin administrative offices. It ısn't exactly fascinating work d it paid abominably, but in way it was fun and it did get ɜ out of the house.

In fact, the job was a dsend. Paul, my husband, was caught up in various ganizational tasks that he rdly spent any time at home. ıd when he was home he'd ually be locked in his study, eparing for a class or marking pers. He saw quite a lot of orinda, of course—she was estimably helpful with all the ıancial problems Paul had to ındle.

He'd dash over to her office ·arly every day in the late ternoon and they'd some-nes work until eight or nine M. Occasionally they'd even ent weekends coping with me particular emergency. As I ld Florinda, she saw more of y husband than I did, at hich she laughed; and she ared his life far more than I d, but I didn't say that. Paul, ter all, had never talked much ɔout his work.

I took to stopping off at her ·fice on my way home from ork—not often, only when I lt really depressed and couldn't face the empty house —in the hope of persuading Paul to buy me dinner or at least a drink. That's how I met Charlie Smith, Florinda's husband. It was a shock at first, but on second thought I decided it wasn't so surprising.

Charlie was a mild little man, at least half a foot shorter than his wife, and so thin and shriveled-looking that she seemed to tower over him. His amiable, rather blank face was almost hidden by huge black-rimmed glasses that had difficulty staying on his button nose. A fringe of graying light hair surrounded a very pink bald skull. He was a sweet little man, as nondescript as his wife was striking. He once vaguely told me that he was "in oil"; much later I found out that he was a supervisor for some Texaco filling stations.

Charlie had started dropping in on Florinda with the same idea I had, and with as little luck. He and I would sit in the waiting room, chatting about nothing in particular, hoping our spouses would come out of Florinda's office. Or one of us would timidly knock on her door. Once or twice the four of us had dinner together, but more often than not we were told they were busy and would just grab a sandwich later.

So eventually Charlie and I

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started having dinner together, Dutch on my insistence, except for a couple of times when I allowed him to invite me to one of the better restaurants in town. One of those times, in fact, we ran into Florinda and Paul, who were just coming into the restaurant as we were leaving it. They'd been so worn out, they said, that a good leisurely meal had suddenly become a necessity. So Charlie and I sat down again and waited for them.

In the succeeding months I got to know Charlie Smith quite well. We had absolutely nothing in common except that my husband and his wife spent a lot of their time together. Nevertheless I liked Charlie a lot and somehow we always managed to keep the talk flowing. He was a Texan by birth, breeding, and conviction. I don't think he'd left the state more than a couple of times in his 43 years, except for service in the Army. But he was open-minded and willing to listen to stories about other places.

So I began to reminisce about my beloved New England and about Europe, which I'd visited often. And I listened to his quite amusing tales of his youth in Texas. Whenever Florinda's name came up his face would take on a glow.

"She's a great woman, Flor. Got a real great brai Hell of a lot smarter than mo of those professors she dea with—not your husband, c course," he'd add hastily.

On other occasions he' wonder why she had ev condescended to marry him an naturally I couldn't say tha probably no one else had ev asked her. He did claim tha he'd had competition, but a the time I didn't believe him.

"Truth is, she's just abou the most remarkable woman know," he'd tell me dreamil "And real kind too. Yo should see her with my folk Sometimes when she's not to busy she'll even go to one c my firm's get-togethers. Migh seem nothing to you but thos fellows are pretty rough. Aft all, she deals with higher type and naturally she's bored wit my crowd. But she comes wit me whenever she can—just to b nice to me!"

It was really pathetic. Ther I'd been going to those dam faculty parties for years an nobody thought I was s wonderful.

And so that first academi year in Austin passed and I wa beaming at the thought c getting back to Maine for thre long summer months. Until on day Paul quietly announced tha he simply couldn't get away.

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"Why don't you go as lanned, Emily? I'll come when can and stay for as long as I an."

I burst into tears. I just ouldn't help it.

"I don't want to go alone! 've spent most of the past year lone, and I want you to go ith me. It's unfair anyway. ou need a break. And what bout the book? You promised o finish it by the end of the ummer. The publisher won't ke another delay."

"The hell with the publisher. ook, Emily, I'm awfully sorry ut that's the way it is. I know his has been a rough year for ou but this is a damn omplicated job I've taken on nd I'm still learning the opes."

"Hasn't Florinda managed to each you anything in all this ime?"

"Leave Florinda out of his!"

The roughness of his tone tartled me and in my surprise I topped crying. Paul had always een polite to me. He continued, more gently, "There's othing I'd like better than to o with you to Maine. Do you hink I want to swelter here in undred-degree heat? But I imply have to finish reorganizng the department. It'll take a ew weeks longer, no more, and hen I'll join you."

But he didn't join me until the second week in August. When we got back to Austin early in September, life resumed exactly as before. Paul spent a lot of time with Florinda, I spent a lot of time with Charlie. I also went back to work and occasionally had lunch with Florinda. Though I'd met a few other people in the past year, she was the closest I had in Austin to what might be called a friend, and I was quite fond of her. But then everybody liked Florinda.

So it came as a terrible shock when she was found dead. In her car. Head battered in by someone in a frenzy. Purse gone. She'd been on her way home at night and why she had stopped the car on the dark lonely road one could only guess. The police assumed that she'd picked up a hitchhiker—she was always feeling sorry for people—who had then killed her and made off with her purse. That was found later, emptied of cash, in a bush some distance away.

Paul was quite shattered by the news, but it was Charlie I was concerned about. He took the tragedy in a strangely quiet way—withdrawn, as if nothing mattered any more. It was difficult to get through to him. He rarely answered when spoken to—just sat and stared.

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The only thing he'd say, and he repeated that over and over, was, "Flor was too sensible to pick up a bum in the middle of the night."

I tried to talk him out of that but despite our friendship he didn't seem to want me around. In fact, after a while he began to give me strange looks that frightened me and I started wondering if the shock had unhinged his mind.

It was almost a relief, in spite of my affection for him, when ten days after Florinda's murder Charlie committed suicide. Took poison. Left a note that Flor had not been killed by a tramp. The real shocker was that poor gentle Charlie confessed he'd killed his wife—because he was afraid she was "playing around" and going to leave him. Now he knew he'd been wrong and couldn't stand having suspected her. In any case, life without her wasn't worth living. The note was still stuck in the typewriter when his body was found by the maid.

Poor old Charlie. I cried and cried when I heard he was dead.

That was last year. We got back from Maine a couple of months ago. Paul, as usual, is very busy. He found someone else to help him with his many administrative problems and is home as rarely as he was in Florinda's day.

I miss Florinda and Charlie. They were my only friends here, and now I'm really lonely. How I wish they weren't dead!

It's no way to hold a husband.

"O"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

his is the 377th "first story" to be published by Ellery ueen's Mystery Magazine . . . a most amusing story—bright id breezy, sly, smart, and sophisticated . . .

The author, Tonita S. Gardner, taught elementary school in ie 1950's and at present she alternates between being a ousewife (husband an insurance executive; three children) id pecking away at her portable typewriter. She has written tons" of light verse and much of it has appeared in Good 'ousekeeping, McCall's, The Wall Street Journal, etc.

Mrs. Gardner's hobbies include: writing, of course (which ie calls "a way of life"), reading, cooking, and, "at infrequent itervals, hopping a plane with my husband and flying off to xplore some small segment of Planet Earth."

When you've finished reading Mrs. Gardner's "first story" which we predict will be chosen for many anthologies), you'll now what we mean when we say: we can't wait to read her econd! . . .

A GIRL CAN'T ALWAYS HAVE EVERYTHING

by TONITA S. GARDNER

When Suzy Millette sat down to write her icide note, she had no tention of killing herself. She ily wanted to scare her isband into taking her back.

"How do you spell 'des-rate'?" she asked—and while I as considering if the word had "a" or an "e" after the "p," must have looked so serious that she started to grin. "We've got to do this right or he'll never believe it's a matter of life and death." She winked at me and laughed so hard that tears rolled down her cheeks and she had to adjust a false eyelash.

"All kidding aside," she said when she'd recovered from her giggles, "I mustn't foul up again. Where would I find

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another money-machine like Herbert? Ugh, Herbert!" She sighed. "A girl can't always have everything."

Suzy seemed to have everything, and she usually got what she wanted. This time she wanted a young computer executive whom she'd met in a swingers' bar; he was part of the foul-up.

"Still and all," she concluded as she signed the letter and slipped it into an envelope, "there are certain times, my friend, when it's inconvenient to have a husband."

But Suzy had always felt this way, even in the beginning, three years before.

We were roommates then; we shared a small apartment in New York—a comfortable arrangement because we both had bit parts in the same off-Broadway play. Suzy's stage name was Suzy Starr; I used my real name, Patricia Lewis.

Through an actor friend of mine who knew some VIP's, Suzy convinced me to wangle an invitation to a swanky East Side party. I'd been told some movie people were going to be there, and when I mentioned this to Suzy she'd beamed at me and crossed her fingers. "Opportunity knocks, Pat—we could wind up in Hollywood!"

It was one of those stand-up cocktail affairs. Suzy immediately began to circulate. decided to follow her example and as soon as I spotted Herbert, I was positive I' found a real live producer. H certainly looked like one: bi expensive cigar, balding head paunchy stomach. I was all se to say hello, but then chickened out and went t check my makeup.

When I got back, Suzy wa with him. (I couldn't blame her it was every girl for herself. But even though I lacked m friend's charisma, I watched he operate and had to admire he technique: her dress was tigh enough to show off he marvelous figure, and with he auburn hair, green eyes, and creamy white skin she flattered a man just by giving him he undivided attention.

Herbert was enchanted.

It didn't take Suzy long to discover that our "producer" was actually a toy manufacturer—with factories in fou states.

He was also a widower and unattached.

"No wonder he can't take his eyes off me," Suzy confided when we met in the powder room. "He showed me a picture of his dear departed. A face like a broken-down bulldog!" She flashed her brilliant smile. "But this guy is loaded—and I don't mean from drinking."

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When a huge bouquet of rchids arrived at our apart- ıent the next day, Suzy knew ıat Herbert was hooked—hers ɔr the taking. And she took lenty. (Each time she came ome with something new, atty the Pauper tried her best ot to drool.) At first there was series of moderately expensive aubles, then it snowballed into mink coat and a Thunderbird. "Quite a haul for a small-time arm girl!" she gleefully in- ormed me.)

Suzy wasn't hepped-up bout marriage, but not want- ng to lose her golden goose, she aid yes. They were married in City Hall, and I was her only ttendant; afterward, while Herbert's luxurious penthouse vas being completely redec- ɔrated for his lucky bride, the ıoneymooners settled tempor- arily at the nearby Plaza Hotel, so Suzy could be available in case the decorator needed her. (P.S.: He needed her, she was available.)

As soon as the honeymoon was over, Suzy decided to rejoin the show, mainly because she was having an affair with the leading man; when he left for a more lucrative out-of-town offer, Suzy immediately lost interest in her theatrical career.

"One thing about being married to a rich man," she snickered, "it makes a girl like me lose all her ambition."

"I'd be the same if I didn't have to pay rent every month," I told her, hoping she'd take the hint and spread the wealth.

Instead, she gave me a pep talk: "Your turn'll come too, Pat. And when it does, milk it for all it's worth."

"Sure," I said, "but I'm hardly an expert like you."

"Then for heaven's sake, girl, learn from me! You're only on this earth for a few years—and if you don't grab in some goodies while you're still young enough and pretty enough, you certainly won't be able to when you're older."

I nodded and made a mental note to learn from the Starr of the show.

At this time Herbert was 47 to Suzy's 27, but like a young passionately-in-love bridegroom he confessed his longing to become a father.

"Yi-ich!" Suzy relived the scene for me. "It took all my self-control just to keep from upchucking my fifty-dollar din- ner."

"What could you say, though?"

"I'm a better actress than you think, Pat. You should have heard us gooing together about our own little itty-baby- kins! But if he stuck it out with Dog-Face for nineteen years

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and she couldn't have kids, he'll also stick it out with me when I give him the same bad news."

"Suppose you become pregnant?"

"Thank God for the Pill! But isn't it a riot?—he thinks I'm going to be a brood mare so he can have a sonny-boy who looks like him"—and she pulled at her jaw to approximate Herbert's jowls. "He's got another think coming!"

Herbert had no way of knowing this. When I called up once and found him home with the flu, he told me Suzy was at her doctor's getting tested to find out why she couldn't conceive. "She wants to become a mother very badly," he said, sounding so wistful I actually felt sorry for him.

Of course he also had no way of knowing that the M.D. whom Suzy was supposed to be consulting was really a chorus boy from a new musical on West 44th Street. As for the medical bills for her "treatments"—no problem: Suzy knew an expensive Fifth Avenue doctor whom she'd gone out with a few times ("God, he had hands like an octopus!") and who, as a special favor to her, was now willing to mail huge bills to Herbert, which the latter promptly paid. But in spite of her own numerous affairs Suzy kept a shrewd eye on any attractive female with whom Herbert came in contact. (Had she included me, I would have been flattered!)

They say the husband is always the last to know, but Suzy managed so well Herbert might never have found out.

Except for one thing.

It started with a business trip of his down South. Since Suzy went with Herbert only on expensive vacations, she figured this was a good chance to get away to Bermuda for a secret holiday with her newest, the computer executive. (No one she knew ever went to Bermuda, and Herbert thought she was expected at the family farm in Wisconsin: "Too bad you can't call me there, darling. The folks still don't have a phone.")

She packed her bags as soon as Herbert left, and three hours later she and her computer exec arrived at Kennedy Airport. But unknown to them, Herbert's flight had been delayed because of a phony bomb threat, and when they entered the Eastern terminal arm in arm, there was Herbert, almost ready to board his plane.

Suzy was so flabbergasted that for once in her life she didn't know what to say. Not that it would have mattered.

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espite her blonde wig and ark glasses, Herbert's vision as 20-20. ("Oh, the look on is face, Pat! The look on his ice!") He left on his trip ıyway. Suzy, too upset to ontinue on to Bermuda, went ome alone.

That afternoon she called ıe. "I'm in a terrible mess, at," and after spilling the hole story she added, "While I tood there with my mouth anging open, he told me that s soon as he gets back he's topping at the house to collect is things. Pat, what should I lo?"

She sounded so unhappy hat I hurried to her apartment. 3y the time I got there, she'd egained her usual aplomb. 3usily unpacking her suitcase, *he* tried to reassure *me:* "It's ıot as hopeless as it sounds, old ɔal. I've got an idea that will vork out perfectly. In three vords—The Sinner Repents."

"How do you propose to do *hat?*"

"By composing a suicide ıote." Slyly she smiled. "I think I can scare Herbert into taking me back." She reached for some notepaper and a pen and began to write, thanking me profusely when I reminded her to make her hand quiver.

"What would I ever do without you, Pat?"

I smiled back at her. "Suzy, even *you* can't always think of everything."

"And I'm a lousy speller too."

"You need help? Ask *me.*"

"How do you spell 'desperate'?" she asked—and while I was considering if the word had an "a" or an "e" after the "p," I must have looked so serious that she started to grin. "We've got to do this right or he'll never believe it's a matter of life and death."

Then, after going through her false-eyelash-giggles routine, and vowing not to foul up again, Suzy signed the letter and slipped it into an envelope, concluding, "There are certain times, my friend, when it's inconvenient to have a husband."

Carefully she addressed and sealed the envelope, and was now ready to launch her plan.

"Listen closely, Pat. On Wednesday, right before Herbert's due back from his trip, I'll go to the Plaza Hotel, get myself a room there, and wait to hear from you. *Your* base of operations will be the drug store near my apartment; they have plenty of phone booths. What you'll do is start calling Herbert, try to catch him the moment he comes home to pack up and leave for good. His plane lands about five thirty, so figure he'll be home about

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seven. As an extra precaution, though, you can begin phoning at a quarter to."

"Why would I call him?"

"To make sure he's there! When he finally answers, hang up. Then, and only then, you can call me at the Plaza. And I can start timing everything."

"Such as?"

"Such as gulping down a bunch of sleeping pills."

"Wha-at!"

"It's part of the plan. If you'll listen I'll explain."

"Suzy, I'd be scared stiff if I were—"

"I am scared—a little."

"Then don't take those things. Just pretend to."

"Uh, uh. It's got to be as real as possible. That's why I'm working out every detail so that nothing can go wrong. Now, the moment you call me with the go-ahead signal, you *immediately* rush up to the apartment and give Herbert my note. Only you're not supposed to know what it says. Meanwhile, I'll wait about ten minutes, then take the pills."

"What do I tell Herbert?"

"Tell him that while you were out making your theatrical rounds, Suzy must have let herself into your apartment with her old key. Because when you got home you found this sealed letter addressed to him in Suzy's handwriting, along with a memo to yourself: 'Dear Pa Please see that Herbert gets th letter.' Of course you'd be ver puzzled by the whole busines and since you thought the lett *must* be important, you hurrie right over to give it to hin *Comprende?*"

"I'm beginning to."

"When he opens the letter- wham! And you'll have t pretend to be a little stunne yourself, Pat."

"I'm stunned already."

"Now, if he asks you wher in the world I could be, you won't have the slightest idea But don't ham it up, girl; this i Academy Award time!"

"So how'll he know where to find you?"

"Easy. You'll suddenly remember that I once talked about wanting to recapture the past, or some such goop, and if the dodo doesn't pick up the clue, you then suggest the Plaza Hotel where he and I spent our happy happy honeymoon. Of course he'll grab the phone and ask if a Mrs. Millette is registered, and naturally the answer'll be no."

"No! But I thought—"

"I can't use my *real* name, silly. It wouldn't look like the real thing. But he ought to be smart enough to also try my maiden name and/or my stage name, and if he isn't, you drop another hint and Eureka!—

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they'll answer that a Miss Starr is registered in Room so-and-so."

"So far so great."

"And there's also another valid reason for picking the Plaza," she elaborated. "It's only a block away from our apartment, and since I'll have to gulp down a lot of pills to make the 'suicide' look good, I want to be sure he can get there as soon as possible to slap me awake, et cetera."

"How do you know he won't call for an ambulance instead? Or even call the police?"

"That's where *you* come in, Pat. Just shove him toward the door: 'Hurry, hurry! You've got to save her—I'll call a doctor!'—and start dialing like crazy. Then when he leaves, you wait a few minutes and to really play it safe, call good old Dr. Octopus, who's always dying to take my temperature. His office is near the Plaza, and on Wednesdays he has hours till nine. Hopefully, he'll get to me after Herbie Hero's already saved my life." She looked pleased with herself. "See—no fuss, no muss, no scandal!"

"Suzy," I enthused, "it's terrific!"

"And by the way, Pat, I also plan to leave my hair loose, the way Herbert likes it best, but do you think I should wear a sexy black lace negligee, or maybe a white silk—you know, something pure-looking?"

"Definitely the pure-looking."

Nodding her agreement, she handed me the envelope. "It's going to work like a charm."

Well, to make a long story short—as I said before, when Suzy sat down to write her suicide note, she had no intention of killing herself.

But in life things don't always work out according to plan. Or do they?

May she Rest In Peace.

Of course Herbert said I could have all her expensive clothes and designer furs, but I didn't want them—even though Suzy would think I was a dope for not taking whatever I could get.

"When any opportunity comes along, Pat, just grab it!" she used to say to me. And she was right. (To prove it I now have my own charge accounts at Bergdorf's and Saks' Fifth under my new name, Mrs. Herbert Millette.)

Yes, I learned a lot from Suzy. And I'm grateful. That's why I followed her instructions so carefully—right down to the letter. (Or should I say right *up* to the letter?)

How clever of me to have stamped and mailed it.

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THE CASE OF THE NASHING TEETH

by FRANCIS M. NEVINS, JR.

My wife and I both belong to MWA:
She is a charter member of the Mystery Widows of America and I of the Mystery Widowers of the USofA.
She can't yank my nose out of any detective story in which my nose happens to be buried
And I can't push her nose into any, which is why the future of our marriage has me so worried.
After eight years of exposure she still has not read one book by Carr or Gardner or Stout or Christie,
And the way things look now I doubt that she ever will, even after she reaches the mandatory retirement age of sisty.
Truth to tell, she has read and claimed to like one novel by Ellery Queen;
But that was when we were dating and she was trying to impress me with her intellectual attainments as well as her cuisine.
Since she dragged me screaming to the altar her consumption of the literature of crime has dropped to zero,
And her refusal remains adamant no matter whether Wolfe or Poirot or Dr. Fell or Ed Noon or Tuddleton Travelstead Trotter or even Sheriff Bucyrus Duckhouse is the hero.
When I try to interest her in the crazy adventures of Harry Stephen Keeler's great series character Angus MacWhorter,
She couldn't be boreder.
Yet to assert that she has less sympathy for published mystery fiction than for anything else would be a base canard and a lie;
She is turned off even more by the untold number of unsold but brilliant ideas hatched in the brain of I.
When I excitedly tell her my new gimmick for having a high-priced call girl poisoned in a Chinese restaurant and calling the story "Won Ton for a Wanton,"
She turns up her little rabbit nose like a snooty duchess being panhandled by a costermonger in the foulest slums of Lonton.
And several years ago when I announced that I wanted to do a

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novel where every word the gangsters say is bugged by dozens of law enforcement agencies and that I'd call it *The Night Has a Thousand Ears*,

She smirked with scientific smugness and said, causing me to drop the project, "You couldn't sell that silly idea to a publisher in a thousand zillion years."

This is the kind of putdown up with which for eight years I have been forced to put;

For relief from such harassment I would gladly give a hand and perhaps also a foot.

Mystery Widowers of the World, Unite! *REVOLUTION NOW* will free us from that nibbling at our favorite pastime which our wives indulge in with teeth sharp as a mouse's,

And all we stand to lose is our spouses.

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THE JURY BOX

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Glancing back over what I have written this year, I see that on no less than two occasions there has been time out for tribute. In July we honored my old friend Anthony Berkeley Cox, a grand master largely unrecognized. In September it was Anglo-Irish Sax Rohmer, remembering how tall stood Fu-Manchu amid the bogeymen of yesteryear. Apart from eulogy, and some few odd matters to be rounded out later, how shall we sum up 1972?

It went much as usual: neither feast nor famine, but with worthy items outweighing the inept. Both sides of the Atlantic provided a duo of homicidal ladies triumphant in straight detection.

Our own Emma Lathen, with *The Longer the Thread*, and the lady who writes as "Paul Kruger," with *The Bronze Claws*, matched Ngaio Marsh's *Tied Up in Tinsel* and *Season of Snows and Sins* by Patricia Moyes. To the same category belongs Sara Woods's *And Shame the Devil*, in which Antony Maitland, barrister-detective, faces problems racial as well as criminal against a background of dourest Yorkshire.

Still! We needn't have any author "match" another; since all these write well and play fair, it's unnecessary. Good sleuthing, action-spiced, also animates Bill Pronzini's *The Snatch*, Peter Lovesey's *The Detective Wore Silk Drawers*, Hugh Pentecost's *Birthday, Deathday*. But any prize for ingenious mystification must go to *The Japanese Mistress*, by Richard Neely, which, though seeming to hide nothing up its kimono sleeve, can still wallop our wits with a stunning surprise finish.

In the realm of the mystery-adventure-thriller, you are safe either with *The Curtained Sleep*, Archie Roy's Scottish conflagration, or with *The Procane Chronicle*, Oliver Bleeck's New York-Washington murder-go-round. Espionage too has been well served by Victor Canning (*Firecrest*), James Mitchell (*A Red File for Callan*), Berkely Mather (*The Terminators*), and Robert MacLeod (*Path of Ghosts*).

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Since books of short stories are notoriously difficult to sell, you may be surprised to find three such collections in a twelve-month. And yet the publisher of each had good reason. Soon after the success of his first anthology, *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, Sir Hugh Greene followed it with *More Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, about gumshoes the world over during those early years 1891-1914. *Murder Most Foul*, M.W.A.'s '71 anthology under the editorship of Harold Q. Masur, upheld the high standard that has never failed us. If aristocratic or titled sleuths were listed by alphabet, beginning with Roderick Alleyn and ending with Prince Zaleski, perhaps the most famous would be Dorothy L. Sayers's Peter Death Bredon Wimsey, younger brother of the Duke of Denver. His twenty detective exploits, gathered together in *Lord Peter*, made (and still make) a dazzling landmark for the year.

Factual crime reconstructed? Again we have fared well. *Great Mysteries of History*, by Kenneth B. Platnick, offers sixteen unsolved enigmas, from the death of Amy Robsart in 1560 to such later grotesques as the Abominable Snowman or the Loch Ness Monster. *The Case of Kitty Ogilvie*, by Jean Stubbs, strikes fiery sparks from an eighteenth-century poison drama of ailing husband, errant wife, gay seducer, inevitable end. Jean Plaidy's high-flying *Murder Most Royal*—one victim Queen Anne Boleyn, second wife of King Henry VIII; the other victim Queen Catherine Howard, his fifth wife—starkly reveals the truth about this callous Caesar, whom legend has changed into an almost avuncular figure of fun.

Today, with new books so outrageously priced, let's welcome our current bonanza of paperbacks. Here are ten titles from Dame Agatha Christie, as well as Sax Rohmer's first three novels about untiring Dr. Fu-Manchu. Nero Wolfe, as directed by Mr. Stout, attacks two difficult cases; James Bond takes on organized crookdom rather than espionage. And don't forget G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Thursday*, either as philosophical fantasy or as rip-roaring cloak-and-dagger with sensational if non-lethal end.

Now for unfinished business. Some time ago, among many fine Sherlockian studies published by Luther Norris, I praised Marvin Kaye's *The Histrionic Holmes*. Several Holmesians asked where they might procure an item unknown to local booksellers. If you are among the curious, write to Mr. Norris at 3844 Watseka Avenue, Culver City, California 90230. You won't regret it; it should prove an open sesame into the enchanted world of Baker Street.

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The drug-abuse problem has hit Aldershot High School, and Detective Roberts enlists the help of Mr. Strang, the little old science teacher. Roberts can pick up the pushers, but the police want more—they want the top man, the one responsible for the supply of cocaine at Aldershot. So Mr. Strang agrees to track down The Snowman—The Abominable Snowman . . .

MR. STRANG VERSUS THE SNOWMAN

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

Wearily Mr. Strang climbed the stairs of Mrs. Mackey's rooming house just as the hall clock chimed six. It had been a long day, and he still had three sets of chemistry tests to correct. Still, the weather report had predicted snow, perhaps several inches. Maybe Aldershot High School would be closed tomorrow.

The door to his room was slightly ajar. He started to push it open and then paused, sniffing several times like a hunting dog on a hot scent.

"Paul Roberts, what are you doing in my room?" he called loudly. Pushing the door open, he glared in mock anger over the tops of his black-rimmed glasses at the figure lounging in the easy chair in the far corner of the room.

Detective-sergeant Paul Roberts slowly got to his feet, his huge body looming over that of the slender, gnomelike teacher. "Waiting for you," he said. "Mrs. Mackey was on her way out when I got here, but she said it would be okay for me to come up. By the way, how'd you know I was in here before you opened the door?"

Mr. Strang rubbed the cold from his gnarled hands and then removed hat, scarf, and overcoat, hanging them on the ancient clothes rack behind the door. "Like Sherlock Holmes, I hate to reveal my methods," he

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chuckled. "But really, Paul, that shaving lotion of yours would gag a billygoat."

"I kind of like it," said Roberts. "It's called Boots and Saddle."

"Umm. The boots and saddle must have belonged to a Russian Cossack who hadn't bathed in six months," said Mr. Strang. "But what can I do for you, Paul? Has one of my students gotten himself into a jam?"

"Not exactly, but—" Roberts paused, uncertain how to begin. "Look, are you familiar with the name of Simon Barasch?"

"If you've done your homework before coming here, you know good and well the answer is yes," replied the teacher. "His grandson Arthur is in my physics class. Arthur's been living with Simon since his father died three years ago."

"Simon," mused Roberts. "You're on a first-name basis with Barasch?"

"About six weeks ago Simon Barasch broke his leg," said Mr. Strang. "Arthur was out of school for ten days to take care of him. During that time he missed a good deal of work in physics. So a couple of times a week he's been staying after school with me for extra help. He lives way out at the edge of town, and I drive him home in my car. Quite often I go into the house to see Simon. He's confined to his wheel chair and doesn't get many visitors."

"Yeah," said Roberts in a flat voice. "What do you two talk about, Mr. Strang?"

The teacher's mouth snapped closed with an audible click, and he shook his head vehemently. "Paul, we've been friends for a long time," he said. "But I'm not going to say another word about Simon Barasch until I find what this is all about."

From the pocket of his overcoat Roberts drew out a sheet of yellow paper. "Simon Barasch," he began, glancing at the paper. "Alias Samuel Barr. In 1935 he served twenty months of a three-to-five-year sentence for smuggling. Paroled. Next heard of in '42, accused of bringing in narcotics from Mexico. He managed a hung jury on that rap.

"He got an acquittal on a charge of narcotics possession in '50, but in '54 he began serving five years of a seven-to-ten-year jolt for the theft of several ampules of morphine from a hospital in Seattle. Paroled again." Roberts stopped reading and looked at the astounded teacher. "Did Simon Barasch even mention any of this during your visits, Mr. Strang?"

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"No, I never knew. Is he wanted by the police now?"

"Not officially. But that's why I'm here. I want to talk about Simon Barasch."

"I'm afraid I still don't understand. If Simon's not guilty of any crime I don't see that his past record can be held against him."

"Mr. Strang, during the past few months, one drug—cocaine—has been coming into Aldershot in a big way. Some people call it 'coke' or 'snow,' but whatever name you use it's pure poison. And most of it's being used by teen-agers—your students over there in Aldershot High School. They prefer it to other hard drugs like heroin because it doesn't show up in urine tests, so they can take the school's screening physicals without having to worry.

"They start out sniffing it up their nose for a quick high, and when that doesn't work any more they use a needle to pop it into a vein. First thing you know, they're hooked. They've got a monkey on their back that would make King Kong look like a midget."

"Is the problem really that serious?"

"In the past two months we've found thirty-three kids who were users. Five were confirmed addicts, one of 'em a seventh grader. Those with big habits have had to be taken out of school and placed under treatment. And God knows how many teen-agers are on the stuff that we haven't found out about yet."

"And because of his previous record you think Simon Barasch is peddling the—uh—snow?"

Roberts wadded up the paper and thrust it deep into his pocket. "If pushers were all we were interested in I could walk out of here right now and have the Aldershot jail full in an hour. But they'd just be replaced by others. The guy we're really after is the one we call The Snowman."

Mr. Strang removed his glasses and blinked at Roberts, a puzzled frown on his face. "The who?" he asked.

"Look, Mr. Strang, cocaine may go through a dozen hands before it gets to the eventual user. Each time it's cut with sugar or milk powder to increase the volume—and the profits. But the process has got to start somewhere.

"In its pure form cocaine comes in blocks the size of a small brick. Usually each block is sealed in plastic. Somebody has to receive these blocks from suppliers and begin the process of breaking the cocaine down into smaller units. If we can make him—get a positive

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identification—the whole local organization could collapse."

"And you think this person—The Snowman—is Simon Barasch?"

"It figures. You can't just go out on the open market and buy cocaine. It takes connections, delivery techniques, means of payment. And the only person we've been able to come up with who'd know about these things is Barasch. On the other hand, we've got no real evidence of narcotics dealings by him since he moved to Aldershot."

"I see. And just where do I come in?"

"Aside from his grandson and a few delivery men—any of whom might be bringing in the cocaine—you're about the only one who can get into the house without making Barasch suspicious."

"And once inside what do I do? Search the premises? Hold him at gunpoint?"

"Just keep your eyes open. See if there's anything out of the ordinary. A cupboard he keeps locked, a glassine bag in the trash—anything."

"Sounds like locating a needle in a haystack."

Roberts gave a tired sigh. "It's all we've got going for us, Mr. Strang. And frankly, even if we locate cocaine in the Barasch house we can't be certain of a conviction. What I'd really like is to catch Barasch with his pockets full of the stuff in front of eyewitnesses. But anything you find might allow us to scare him into closing down his operation. That would be something."

"I'll try, Paul. That's the best I can promise. But Barasch—well, he just doesn't seem the type."

"They seldom do, Mr. Strang. And if he's clean I'll be the first to apologize. Do you think you can get over there tomorrow?"

"Yes, if the blizzard they've been predicting holds off and there's school. Arthur's due in my room at three thirty to complete an experiment. He should be finished by five o'clock. I'll have a visit with Simon when I drive Arthur home. But what's the hurry?"

"There's talk around that the supply of cocaine in town right now is kind of low. There's got to be a delivery in the next day or so. Maybe, just maybe, we'll get lucky."

The following morning, as Mr. Strang drove to Aldershot High School, the sky was heavy with gray clouds. The predicted snow, however, held off until shortly after lunch, when huge flakes began to fall, sticking wetly wherever they landed. By the end of the school day the

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blizzard was in full blast, the air full of snowflakes and the ground covered to a depth of almost three inches.

In his room Mr. Strang was just putting away a distilling apparatus in the storage closet when he heard the classroom door open.

"It's me, Mr. Strang," called a voice. "Arthur Barasch. I thought I'd get started with that experiment now."

In the doorway of the storage closet Mr. Strang looked from the boy to the snow beating against the windows. "You didn't catch your bus," he said peevishly.

"No, sir. I thought I'd report here the way you said."

"Arthur," said Mr. Strang, trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice. "It's snowing outside—hard. You can't possibly finish in less than an hour. How were you planning to get home?"

"Couldn't you—I mean, you always drove me before."

"My car, young man, is not a snowplow. It tends to get stuck in anything worse than a heavy dew. Come on. We'll leave before the streets get any worse and—" The teacher paused, remembering his conversation with Paul Roberts the previous evening.

"And then I think I'll wait out this snowstorm at your house," he concluded.

During the drive to the Barasch house Mr. Strang's small purple car skidded alarmingly on the slippery streets, and the windshield wipers fought a losing battle against the falling snow. As the teacher pulled into the driveway and up to the side door, a rear fender struck a garbage can, adding still another dent to the car's battered exterior.

The teacher got out to examine the extent of the damage. "Nothing to worry about," he said, rubbing a gloved hand along a scratch where the bare metal was now exposed. "Hardly in the same league with the one I got when I collided with a fire hydrant in front of the school."

"Let's go in, Mr. Strang," said Arthur, his teeth chattering. "It'll be warm inside."

Half blinded by snow sticking to his glasses, Mr Strang permitted himself to be led to the side door and pulled into the entranceway which led into the kitchen. Arthur slammed the door behind him as the teacher stamped his feet to rid them of the thick gobs of snow.

"Whew! What's that, Mr. Strang?" asked Arthur suddenly. "What's that smell?"

Mr. Strang sniffed the air, tentatively at first, but then breathing deeply of the pungent

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odor which filled the small alcove. A beatific smile spread across his face.

"That, my boy," he said, slipping out of his overcoat, "is Scotch whisky. Not just a little bit of it, mind you. A whole ocean."

"Scotch? But how could—" Arthur Barasch took the two steps into the kitchen. "Grandpa, are you all right?" he called.

"Careful there, Artie. Don't get your feet wet. You and Mr. Strang stay over there in the corner and I'll try to get this mopped up."

Simon Barasch, seated in his wheel chair with one plaster-covered leg stretched out before him, reminded Mr. Strang of a wounded walrus. His completely bald head was in sharp contrast to the fearsome mustache of bristling white hair which stretched out across his jowled cheeks. In one pudgy hand he held a pair of tongs almost three feet long, the end of which gripped a paper napkin. With the napkin he was making ineffectual passes at the flood of tan liquid on the kitchen floor. Behind him an open window was admitting a blast of cold air.

"Spilled the whole bottle, I did," Barasch grumbled angrily. "I was just gonna have a little nip, but it fell off the shelf." With the tongs he retrieved the bottle, which was lying on its side on the floor, empty. "Not enough left in it to wet your whistle," the old man continued, tipping it to his mouth in a vain attempt to extract a few more drops.

"You and Mr. Strang go into the living room, Grandpa," said Arthur. "I'll clean this up."

"I'd be obliged if you would," replied Barasch. "And while you're at it close the window, will you? I tried to air out the kitchen after the Scotch spilled, but the snow's coming in something fierce."

Mr. Strang wheeled Barasch into the living room, trying hard not to laugh aloud at the crippled man's mumbled outrage over the loss of his whisky. It was difficult for the teacher to equate this befuddled individual with the hardened criminal described by Paul Roberts the evening before.

"What brings you here this early?" Barasch finally asked. "Artie told me not to expect him until after five."

"The snowstorm. I was afraid that by five we wouldn't be able to make it." As if proving the truth of Mr. Strang's answer, the howling of the wind outside increased. There was a sharp click, and the front door banged open, admitting a flurry of snow.

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"The confounded place is coming down around my ears!" roared Barasch as the teacher quickly slammed the front door and shot the bolt into place. "Whisky bottles jump off the shelf. Doors pop open by themselves. The house must be haunted."

Without answering, Mr. Strang looked about the room for anything that might be construed as incriminating evidence. He quickly ascertained that Simon Barasch was addicted to checkers, Charles Dickens, and wickedly strong cigars, none of which, the teacher was sure, would be of interest to the police.

Arthur Barasch appeared in the doorway to the kitchen, a mop soggy with Scotch whisky in his hand. "The radio says the storm ought to stop by nine," he said. "I guess you'll have to plan on eating here, Mr. Strang."

"I'd like that very much," replied the teacher. "Can I help with the cooking?"

"Naw," said Barasch, sucking at one end of his mustache. "We're having pork chops, and Artie cooks 'em better'n anybody. I'd offer you a drink, but there's nothing left in the house. That is, unless you'd care to wring out that mop."

Mr. Strang, however, insisted on helping in the kitchen. It gave him an opportunity t peer into all the cabinets an closets there. A quick taste wa enough to assure him that eve the soap powder was the re article.

When the meal was finishe he asked for a tour of th house. "Don't know why you want it," was Barasch's repl "You aren't going to se anything but dust. I'm no much on housekeeping. But i you like, Artie'll take yo around. In the meantime I'll se up the checkerboard. I ain' been beat yet, but maybe you' be the first."

A little after nine the snov stopped. At almost the sam time there was the roar of snowplow cleaning the street i front of the house. By then Mr Strang had become convince of two things—first, that he wa a hopelessly inept checker player, and second, that there was no evidence of cocaine o any other drug stronger than aspirin in the entire Barasch house. Simon Barasch not only was unconcerned about the teacher's poking into odd corners, he even went out of his way to show Mr. Strang all the hidden nooks and crannies.

And yet, as he put on his overcoat preparing to leave, Mr. Strang had the distinct impression that the old man was laughing at him.

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"Artie'll have your way to the road shoveled out in no time," said Barasch, shaking the teacher's hand. "Be sure and come back again, Mr. Strang. Any time. It's been real interesting having one of Artie's teachers come in and look us over."

He's a sly one, thought Mr. Strang to himself. He knows what I've been doing. He's not the doddering old fool he pretends to be. Paul was right about him. He has to be The Snowman. But he didn't react, no matter where I looked. So either the cocaine hasn't arrived yet, or else he's already got rid of it to somebody else. Or—

The side door opened and Arthur Barasch entered, stomping the snow from his boots. "All clear, Mr. Strang," he said. "Drive carefully, and I'll see you tomorrow."

"Well, Paul Roberts wanted snow, and now he's got tons of it," muttered the teacher as he got behind the wheel of his car and backed out into the street. Halfway to Mrs. Mackey's he turned on the heater.

The blast of warm air melted the snow on his rubbers, and water formed a shallow pool on the car's plastic floor mats. He felt some of the water soak into the cuffs of his trousers. He wished he were already in his room, where he had a half-full bottle of sherry hidden in a desk drawer. He wouldn't drink it all, of course. Just one glass to—

"Brachiopoda!" he shouted suddenly, his face twisting into a grimace. "Gotcha, Mr. Snowman."

There was a telephone booth on the next corner. Mr. Strang, suddenly oblivious of the hazardous driving conditions, slammed on the brakes. The car skidded alarmingly, traveling almost fifty yards past the telephone before stopping within inches of a gigantic maple tree. His joints crackling, Mr. Strang scuttled back to the booth, jammed a dime into the slot, and dialed Detective Roberts' number.

Twenty minutes later Mr. Strang was seated on the passenger's side of an unmarked police car across the street from the Barasch house. Paul Roberts was behind the wheel, and his sidekick, Detective David Bell, occupied the rear seat. The spot the teacher had chosen commanded a clear view of the house's side door and kitchen window—or it would have had there been any light to see by.

"Are you going to tell us any more about what you saw in the house, Mr. Strang?" asked Roberts. "If I'm supposed to sit here and freeze to death, can't I at least know why?"

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"Not yet, Paul," answered Mr. Strang. "You'd just barge in ahead of time and ruin the whole thing. Besides, there's the boy to consider. I don't think he has any idea of what his grandfather's up to."

"I don't get it, Paul," chimed in Bell. "Where does this guy get off telling you what to do?"

"Sergeant Roberts asked for my help and I'm giving it to him," said Mr. Strang in the same tone he used in dealing with an unruly schoolboy. "He said that to be sure of a conviction, Barasch had to be caught with his pockets full of drugs. And that's exactly how I'm going to deliver him to you. Just be patient."

Ten o'clock and then ten thirty came and went, with only the living-room lights on inside the house. It was nearly eleven when a lamp gleamed from an upstairs window and a figure was seen silhouetted against the curtains.

"That's the boy's room," whispered the teacher. "He's going to bed now. Keep that in mind, both of you. He's no part of your case against Simon Barasch."

A short while later the lamp in Arthur's room went out. Now only the living-room windows were illuminated. Forty minutes went by.

Suddenly Bell, who had bee blowing on his hands to warr them, tapped Roberts on th back. "You see that?" he asked

"Yeah, the lights at the bac of the house went on."

"Simon Barasch is in th kitchen now," said Mr. Strang "And that's our cue to mov closer. If we're careful I thinl we can get to that forsythi bush just opposite the kitche window without being spotted

"Ah, Barasch is probabl just getting a snack or some thing," grumbled Bell. "Any way, I'm glad I wore boots This snow is deep."

The three men got out of the car, taking care not to slam the doors. They plodded through the snow, finally crouching behind the bush about fifteen feet from the kitchen window.

"Now what, Mr. Strang?" breathed Roberts.

"We wait. It shouldn't be long now."

Even as he spoke the three heard the sound of a window latch being turned. The inner pane slid upward, and the hinged storm window tilted out.

"Hey, what—" Bell began. Mr. Strang silenced him with a gloved hand placed firmly over his mouth.

A hand slid out of the window, holding a long object which the teacher recog-

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nized—the tongs Simon Barasch used to retrieve objects dropped to the floor.

More of the arm extended through the window until the end of the tongs reached the pile of snow below the window. The tongs probed for a few moments. Finally they caught something—a small rectangular object that glittered in the light from the window. Swiftly the tongs, gripping their prize, were withdrawn into the house.

"Do you suppose, Mr. Bell," whispered Mr. Strang, "that when that arm appears again, you could get over there and grab it and not let go?"

"Count on me, Mr. Strang." Bell shifted his weight onto the balls of his feet.

Again the hand holding the tongs came through the window. Then Bell was running through the snow. A shout of anger and surprise was heard, followed by Bell's call.

"I got him! Now what?"

Roberts and Mr. Strang ran to the window, where Bell was holding fast to Simon Barasch's wrist with both hands. Inside the house Barasch was struggling in his wheel chair like a hooked fish.

From the pile of snow at his feet Roberts picked up a small white block sealed in plastic. He tore it open and touched his tongue to the block gingerly.

"It's cocaine, all right," he said.

"Paul, do you think this will be enough to get a conviction?" asked Mr. Strang, pointing in through the window.

Roberts looked at the struggling man and then back to Mr. Strang. "I think so," he said with a grin. "Get a load of that, Bell."

From the pocket of Simon Barasch's sweater protruded a second plastic-wrapped block of cocaine.

It was nearly three in the morning when all the formalities incident to booking Simon Barasch for narcotics possession had been complied with. Finally Roberts returned to the squadroom where Mr. Strang was trying without success to find a comfortable position in one of the hard-backed chairs.

"I sent Bell back to look after the boy," said Roberts. "He's the one I feel sorry for in this whole thing. Apparently he had no idea of what old Simon was doing."

"Arthur once mentioned an older sister who's married and lives upstate somewhere," said Mr. Strang. "I'm sure something can be worked out."

There was a long silence between the two men that was finally broken by Roberts.

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"Okay, Mr. Strang," he said. "Give. How'd you know old Barasch had hidden the snow in the—well, in the snow?"

"A chain of deductions, Paul. The chain started with an empty bottle."

"The Scotch bottle you told me about?"

"Exactly. Barasch told Arthur and me that the bottle of Scotch had been on the shelf and had fallen off, spilling its contents. But that couldn't have been the case. Because the bottle was empty."

"So it was empty. So what?"

"Think, Paul. Imagine that bottle lying on its side with whisky pouring out. The level inside the bottle drops. How far down does it go?"

"I guess it'd keep going down until it was below the bottle's neck."

"At which point there'd still be some whisky left in the bottle. And yet the bottle we saw was completely empty!"

"Hey, yeah. That's right," said Roberts.

"Very well, Deduction Number One: Barasch was lying when he said the bottle had fallen accidentally. Therefore he'd deliberately poured out the contents."

"But why would he do a thing like that?"

"Deduction Number Two: by pouring out the Scotch, Barasch was trying to conceal something. Another odor? Doubtful in this case, since the bagged cocaine would have no odor. Therefore there was something on the floor that had to be hidden."

"Like what, Mr. Strang?"

"There seemed to be only one answer that made sense. Barasch poured out the Scotch onto the floor to hide the snow."

"Snow? You mean the cocaine?"

"No, I mean snow—small crystals of frozen water. You see, I believe Barasch had another visitor this afternoon, who entered the house just a minute or two before we arrived. Whoever it was had to have snow on his feet which he tracked into the kitchen. Moments later Barasch heard my car drive up. At that point he made every effort to conceal the snow. Therefore, Deduction Number Three: the visitor was there in secret, and Barasch didn't want his presence to be known to anyone. A secondary inference in the light of what you told me yesterday is that Barasch's visitor was delivering the blocks of cocaine."

"Wait a minute. Why would he plan a delivery when he knew you were coming?"

"The snow—the real kind—did him in, Paul. You see,

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Arthur and I weren't expected until after five. But because of the storm we left the school early. We were more than an hour ahead of time arriving at the Barasch house."

"Slow down, Mr. Strang," said Roberts. "Let me get this straight. You mean when you came into the driveway with the boy, Barasch's connection—the one who delivered the cocaine to him—was *in* the house?"

"Exactly. Imagine their surprise when we pulled up and got out of the car. We'd undoubtedly have discovered them together if I hadn't stopped to examine a scratch on my fender.

"As soon as they saw us, the connection,' as you call him, ran out the front door. He didn't even latch it behind him; the wind blew it open shortly after we'd come in. At any rate, there was Simon Barasch with two blocks of cocaine, a snow-tracked floor, and only seconds to conceal it all.

"So he poured out the Scotch, making the mistake of emptying the whole bottle. Then he opened the window just as we entered and threw out the waterproof packages of cocaine. He didn't even have time to close the window before we got inside; that's why he gave us that story about airing out the kitchen. And within a couple of minutes at most, the packages, as well as the tracks of the fleeing man, were completely covered with snow."

"But what made you figure Barasch wouldn't pick up the packages from the snowbank as soon as you were out of the house?"

Mr. Strang shook his head. "I know Arthur Barasch very well," he said, "and I was sure he wouldn't be an accomplice in his grandfather's dealings. Ergo, Simon had to wait until Arthur was safely in bed before retrieving the cocaine. He knew the packages were perfectly safe in the snowdrift."

Roberts shook his head in wonder. "You got all that by deductions from an empty Scotch bottle, eh?"

Mr. Strang nodded, his wrinkled face beaming.

"Then how about coming over to my place?" said the detective. "I want to see what you can do with a full one."

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

It had always been the boast of the House of Valdez, the best gold- and silversmiths in Mexico, that no customer ever left its shop unsatisfied . . .

ONE MAN'S IGNORANCE

by ROBERT EDWARD ECKELS

Although Antonio Valdez was one of the most successful gold- and silversmiths in the city, he still thought of himself primarily as a craftsman. Thus he preferred to spend his time in the workroom set at the rear of his shop in the Arcade of Tradesmen beside the great Square of Zocalo and leave the selling of the fine goods he made to his assistants. Still, as he told his staff, there was a certain class of customer for whom his personal attention was required. So when the *Yanqui* woman and her husband found nothing to suit them in the shop proper, the girl who had been trying to serve them went back to fetch him.

Valdez hesitated only a moment. "They are not just tourists, are they?" he said. "They have money to spend?"

"Obviously, Señor," the girl said.

"Very well," Valdez said. He turned to the tall Indian-featured man in an ill-fitting blue suit standing near the workbench, fondling a small statuette of a man throwing a ball. "Let them see you go," Valdez said.

The Indian nodded, put down the statuette, and went out through the shop. Valdez slipped out of his work smock and into a suit coat and followed.

He had no difficulty identifying the couple the girl had meant—a tall elegant woman with carefully coiffed blonde hair and her shorter, cigar-chomping husband standing near the front entrance. Valdez went to them and smiled.

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"I am Antonio Valdez," he said. "What may I do for you?"

"I don't know," the woman said. Her voice was offhand, almost diffident. "We're looking for something in silver. But—" She waved a hand at the contents of the shop.

"Of course," Valdez said. "There is nothing here that pleases you." He assumed a thoughtful pose. "What was it you had in mind? A bracelet perhaps? A brooch?"

The woman looked at her husband. "What do you think, Harry? A bracelet?"

Harry removed his cigar and shrugged. "Why not?" he said.

Valdez smiled again. "Then perhaps I have the very thing for you. In my workshop." He moved aside and made an ushering gesture toward the rear.

The woman glanced again at her husband who shrugged once more, and they let themselves be led into the back room of the shop.

"Perhaps this is what you had in mind?" Valdez said, handing the woman a heavy bracelet in an ornate rose design.

She showed it to her husband. "What do you think?"

"Looks to me like the same kind of junk we saw out front," he said.

The woman smiled wryly and handed the bracelet back to Valdez. "I'm afraid it is very similar," she said.

"Of course," Valdez murmured. "Then perhaps over here." He got out a large box and began rummaging through it, handing the woman first one bracelet, then another. Harry watched for a moment, then walked over to Valdez's workbench and picked up the small ballplayer. It was a heavy piece and obviously of silver; but it was so tarnished and stained it was almost completely black.

"Hey," he called to Valdez, "did you make this?"

Valdez paused. "No, Senor," he said. "I did not—although I did make its double." He smiled as if at some happy memory. "Perhaps you noticed the man who left just before I brought you back here?"

"You mean the guy with the suit two sizes too small for him? Yeah, I noticed him. So what?"

"About a week ago he came into my shop for the first time and insisted on speaking to me," Valdez said. "Not knowing what else to do, the girl out front sent him back here. But it was obvious from his dress and general appearance he could not afford the prices that work of the caliber I sell commands, so I'm afraid I was somewhat sharp with him when I asked

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him what he wanted.

" 'Pardon, Senor,' he said, taking off the ridiculous hat he wore and crushing it under his arm, 'but it has been told to me that you are the best worker in silver in the country.'

" 'That is true,' I said, still sharply.

" 'Then perhaps you could make a copy of this,' he said and revealed a package which when opened disclosed the little ballplayer you have in your hand.

"The little figure caught my eye immediately. As you can see, it is of extraordinarily fine workmanship and of solid silver of exceptionally high grade—although obviously it has been subjected to much mistreatment over its lifetime. Then I realized what he had suggested and my anger reasserted itself. 'Copy?' I exploded. 'You come in here and want a *copy!* Do you realize, you stupid peon, what such a copy would cost? Why, the metal alone—'

" 'I would pay whatever you ask, Senor,' the Indian said quietly. And for proof he stuck his free hand in his pocket and pulled out a nugget of gold half the size of a walnut.

"Frankly, Senor," Valdez said, "there is nothing like the sight of gold to make a man reconsider his attitude." Harry nodded agreement and Valdez went on, " 'Perhaps it can b arranged,' I said. 'Let me se the statue.'

"The Indian handed it ove almost gratefully. 'It woul have to be an exact copy,' h said.

"I ignored the insult implici in his words, realizing it was th result of his ignorance, an turned the statuette around i my hands, pretending to study it. Actually, I had no need to. It would be a simple matter to make a mold of the little figure and cast a copy. It needn't be solid silver either. A base of much cheaper material with a thin silver coating would be more sufficient for this simple *Indio.* 'How much gold do you have in all?' I asked.

" 'Ten ounces, Senor,' the Indian said.

"I pretended to consider some more, then nodded. 'That will be sufficient,' I said, aware that the Indian would admit to only what he was willing to pay. 'Come back in a week and the copy will be ready.'

" 'Come back?' the Indian said, sounding confused. 'You wish me to leave the little man?'

" 'Of course leave it,' I said, irritated again. 'I can't work from memory and you certainly didn't expect me to do it this minute, did you?'

" 'I don't know, Senor,' the

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Indian said. 'I had not really thought of it at all. But I cannot leave the little man.' And with that he took the statuette from me and started to leave.

" 'Just a moment,' I said. I wasn't about to back down before this peon, of course. But I wasn't going to let ten ounces of gold get away either—not, I tell you frankly as one man of the world to another, when the work involved would cost at most two. 'If you won't leave the statue,' I said, 'all right. Bring it back tomorrow morning. Then you may wait while I make the mold and take your original away with you when I am finished.'

"The Indian's face brightened. 'Gracias, Senor,' he said, and bobbed his head and left.

"After he had gone I began to wonder if it was the prospect of the gold that interested me most about this affair or the questions that I had no answers for. Obviously the little figure was valuable—or at least the Indian thought it was. But where had he got it? And why was he willing to spend so much for a copy?"

Harry looked thoughtful. "How much is ten ounces of gold in American money?" he said.

"At the official rate of exchange," Valdez said, "about $350. More on the open market."

"That's a lot of money for an Indian," Harry said.

"Yes," Valdez said. "In any case, I made a point of being especially early at my shop the next morning. But even so the Indian was waiting for me, the statuette, wrapped in newspaper, clutched in his hand.

" 'Did you bring the gold?' I said as I let us both into the shop.

" 'Half, Senor,' the Indian said. 'The rest when the copy is made.'

"That was fair enough. So I nodded agreement, weighed the offered amount carefully on my scales, then set about making the mold.

"Unwrapping the statuette, I placed it on my workbench and coated it with a gelatine composition. As I worked I was impressed more and more by the beauty of the little figure. It really was a remarkable piece of work, and I was willing to swear it had not been made by any of my competitors here in the city or anywhere in the country. I'm as familiar with their work as I am with my own, and none of us has this knack of somehow managing to be both realistic and stylized at the same time.

"Several times it was on the tip of my tongue to ask the Indian where he had got the

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statue. But I always refrained, not sure I really wanted to know, because—well, because it might cost me the remaining half of the promised gold. Better to concentrate on the work, which while not difficult was painstaking, and leave speculation for later.

"Which is exactly what I did. As soon as the gelatine was set I peeled it off the original, propped it erect with the open bottom up, and began to fill it with wax I had melted over the small burner on my bench, working carefully to insure that the wax flowed evenly and filled every corner. That done, I simply waited until the wax had cooled and hardened, then went through the business of working off the gelatine covering again, and compared the wax model I had made with the original.

"The only difference I could see was that the model was slightly smaller because the wax had contracted in cooling. But that would be compensated for by the silver coating over the cheaper base. So I was satisfied and told the Indian, who had been standing stolidly behind me throughout, that he could take his original away now.

" 'When will the copy be finished, Senor?' he said, rewrapping the original carefully in the newspaper.

"I nesitated, not sure whether he would regard work done too soon as somehow not worth the price. Then I shrugged; delay was more often fatal than haste. 'Friday,' I said. 'Come back then and bring the rest of the gold with you.'

" 'I will, Senor,' the Indian promised and left. I remained at my workbench, first fixing three thin wax tubes to the model to serve as vents when the mold was formed, then layering it with a clay base prior to packing clay around it and firing it to harden the clay and melt the wax. When that was done, my mold was complete and true to my word I had the copy finished and gleaming mint-new on my workbench when the Indian called back on Friday.

" 'There,' I said proudly, 'an exact duplicate in every detail.'

"But that absurd Indian disagreed. 'Not quite, Senor,' he said. 'The color is wrong.' And to prove his point he held the tarnished original beside the shining copy.

" 'The color?' I made an exasperated face. 'Treat the new the way you have the old and the colors will soon be the same.'

" 'But if one wished to change the color now,' the Indian persisted softly, 'could it be done?'

"I glared at him for another

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moment, then threw up my hands and called the girl Maria in from the shop to send out for some eggs. When she returned, I dismissed her, broke the eggs in a pan, and smeared egg yolk over the duplicate statuette until the silver coating had tarnished to a near jet black. 'Satisfied?' I said when it was done.

" 'Yes, Senor,' he said and paid over the rest of the gold. It was a slight fraction of an ounce heavy. But if the Indian noticed when I weighed it, he didn't comment and left the shop to all appearances well pleased with his purchase.

"More curious than ever, I followed him to the front of the shop and stood just inside the doorway, watching him start across the square toward the Palacio Municipal. I had never asked any of my questions, but I thought I might have the answer nonetheless.

"It was just possible that he was a rich man's servant and wished to steal a valuable statue and put the duplicate in its place to conceal the theft. If so, it meant a chance for more profit for me, because the man's master would undoubtedly be glad to pay a reward to get his treasure back."

"Or better still," Harry put in, "you might be able to 'persuade' the Indian to share his gain to keep the plot secret."

Valdez merely shrugged and looked smug. "As you wish, Senor," he said. "In any case, by now the Indian had almost reached the Palacio and, realizing that I knew nothing about him, not even his name, I set off after him before he could disappear around a corner.

"Frankly, I'm not used to walking, but I found that tall shambling figure in the ill-fitting suit not difficult to keep in sight, even on the less traveled streets where I had to drop back to keep from being discovered. Nevertheless, I was puffing slightly and glad of the respite when at last he turned into a cheap hotel. I stepped into the shade of a doorway from where I could watch the other and was just trying to decide on my next move when the Indian reappeared.

"The wrapped package he had carried from my shop was still in his hand but had grown noticeably smaller. One of the statuettes had obviously been hidden in the Indian's room. But uncertain which—the original or the copy—I had no choice but to stay with the Indian. I waited in the doorway until he had got a safe enough lead, then set out after him again.

"Soon, to my surprise, I

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found myself back at the Zocalo. And for a moment I thought the Indian might be heading back to my shop. But he ignored the Arcade and headed straight for the museum in the National Palace.

"I stopped, frowning, in the center of the square. Why in the name of heaven was he going *there?* Then realizing I was falling dangerously behind I scurried after him.

"For a moment, just inside, I lost sight of the Indian, and I blinked around almost panic-stricken. Then I saw him again, talking to a guard at the far end of the room. I was too far away to hear what was said, but I did see the guard make a peremptory motion with his hand for the Indian to stay where he was, then hurry away himself. Fortunately, the Indian just stood there as stolid as ever, displaying no interest in his surroundings, and I was able to sidle up so that I was no more than fifteen feet away when the guard reappeared, accompanied by a tall severe-faced man wearing rimless glasses.

" 'That is the man, Senor Esposito,' the guard said, nodding toward the Indian, who bobbed his head in return.

" 'I see,' Esposito said. He eyed the Indian sternly. 'I understand that you have something you wish to sell.'

" 'Yes, Senor,' the Indian said, unwrapping the package and holding one of the statuettes out toward Esposito. 'This statue. Made many years ago by my ancestors, before the Spanish came.'

"Esposito took the statuette, frowned, and hefted it in his hands. 'Where did you get this?' he said harshly.

" 'I bought it from my cousin,' the Indian said. 'For one hundred pesos. He said it would be worth at least five hundred if I brought it here.'

" 'A genuine pre-Hispanic Indian statue would be worth five hundred *thousand* pesos,' Esposito said dryly. 'But this one is not the right weight for silver.' He upended the statuette and scraped at its base with his pocketknife, then smiled with sudden satisfaction. 'Just as I thought,' he said. "Not silver. Your cousin has swindled you. Or you've tried to swindle me. In either case, take this—*thing* and get out of here.'

" 'Yes, Senor,' the Indian said, taking the statuette back and bobbing his head.

"Esposito nodded curtly and the Indian turned away to cross the room. I turned quickly myself and pretended to study an Aztec vase until I was sure the Indian was well past me. Then I hurried after Esposito.

" 'Forgive me for intruding,

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Senor,' I said. 'But I couldn't help overhearing what you told that peon. Would you really pay five hundred thousand pesos for a genuine statuette like that?'

"Esposito smiled a superior little smile. 'You aren't a student of the historical art of our country, are you?' he said.

" 'No,' I said truthfully, 'I am not.'

" 'Obviously,' Esposito said. 'Because if you were you'd know that such objects are the property of the State. So even if that statuette had been genuine, I'm afraid that poor Indian would not have got his five hundred thousand pesos after all.'

"We talked a few moments more. Then I excused myself and left the museum. By the time I got outside there was no sign of the Indian, of course. But it didn't matter since I knew where to find him now. I hailed a passing cab and was waiting inside the doorway of the cheap hotel when the Indian got there.

"His eyes widened when he saw me, but I gave him no chance to speak, grabbing him roughly by the arm and crowding him back against the wall. 'You stupid peon,' I said. 'Did you really think you could pass off that copy I made as a genuine Aztec relic?'

" 'No, Senor,' the Indian said simply. 'I did not.'

" 'Don't lie,' I said. 'I followed you to the museum. I heard everything.'

" 'But it is true, Senor,' the Indian protested. 'I did not intend to sell the copy, only the original. Please,' he went on when I continued to glare at him disbelievingly. 'I would not do anything dishonest. Come to my room and I will explain.'

"I hesitated a moment, then followed him up the narrow stairs to his room, a dark cramped cell with barely space for a cot and rickety chair on which I would not condescend to sit. 'All right,' I said sternly. 'Explain.'

" 'It's really very simple, Senor,' the Indian said. 'Some time ago a man came to my village and hired those of us who were young and strong to dig in the hills in search of statues such as the one you made a copy of.' He paused and looked inquisitively at me. 'Perhaps you know the kind of man I mean?'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'An archeologist. So it was from him that you stole the statue.'

" 'No, Senor,' the Indian said earnestly. 'There were watchers everywhere and to try to steal meant a beating or worse. So I would not dare to try. But after the Senor

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Archeologist had gone I went back and dug on my own until I found the little ballplayer. I knew it was valuable, because the Senor Archeologist had set great store by such finds. But *how* valuable I did not know. So how could I be sure I would not be cheated when I went to sell it?

" 'Then I remembered that some of the other diggers had tried to gain favor by offering the Senor false statues they had made themselves. But he was never fooled and those who tried it were not allowed to dig any more. So it occurred to me that if I had a copy made, whoever saw it would not be deceived but seeing no opportunity to gain by my ignorance would be willing to tell me the true value of the real statue. And'—he beamed happily—'that is exactly what happened. Now tomorrow I will take the true statue to the museum and offer to sell it for five hundred thousand pesos.'

" 'And have it taken away from you for your trouble,' I said sarcastically. 'If you weren't an ignorant peon you'd have known that these old Indian statues and relics belong to the State from the moment they're found. So the museum would pay you nothing—merely claim the statuette as its own.'

"The Indian looked at me, his eyes wide and frightened. 'This is true, Senor?' he said.

" 'Of course it's true,' I said. 'The Senor Esposito told it to me himself at the museum.'

"The Indian turned away. 'Then it appears I have wasted my ten ounces of gold,' he said.

"I put my hand on his shoulder. 'Perhaps not,' I said. 'The statue is valueless to you. But I find it interesting. So give it to me and I'll give you your ten ounces of gold back.'

" 'You would do this?' he said.

" 'Of course,' I said. And I did too. We had just finished the transaction when the girl called me out to serve you."

"Well, I must say," the blonde woman said, "that was generous of you."

But her husband smiled cynically. "Maybe less generous than you think," he said. "In fact, maybe not generous at all."

Valdez smiled too. "Alas," he said, "you've found me out. It is true that these objects belong to the State. But the State pays a reward to the finder—ten percent of the value. So tomorrow I will take this little statue to the museum and be paid fifty thousand pesos for my trouble." He shrugged. "Perhaps it is unfair. But the world is unfair, and as the Indian himself said: One man's

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ignorance is another's opportunity.

"And now," he said, looking back down into the box of jewelry, "let us see what we can find for you."

But Harry continued to hold the statuette in his hand, studying it. Finally he said, "How much is fifty thousand pesos in American money?"

Valdez looked up again. "About $7000, I believe," he said.

"Closer to six," Harry said, "but we'll call it seven." He put the statuette down, wrote out a check for $7000, and held it out to Valdez.

"What is that for, Senor?" Valdez said.

"The statue," Harry said. "What else? I like it and all you're out for is the money. So it shouldn't make any difference to you if the money comes from me instead of some old museum, should it?"

Valdez hesitated only a fraction of a minute. Then he said, "No, Senor, it shouldn't. And it has always been the boast of the House of Valdez that no customer leaves unsatisfied." He took Harry's check and wrapped the statuette carefully for him.

Once they were outside, the blonde woman turned furiously on her husband. "Harry, are you out of your mind? Seven thousand dollars for a *statue?*"

"Worth ten times that," Harry said. "You heard the man. And that Mex isn't the only one who can take advantage of another guy's ignorance. Maybe these things do belong to the State down here but they don't up in the U.S. of A. And there are plenty of guys there willing to pay full price without asking any questions about where the statue came from."

"Oh, Harry!" the blonde woman cooed happily, clutching his arm. And they went off too excited to notice the tall Indian-featured man in the ill-fitting suit re-entering Valdez's shop.

"Did you conclude your business successfully, Senor?" he said to Valdez.

"Of course," Valdez said. He handed Harry's check to the Indian. "But you'd better take this over to the bank immediately. I'd prefer it be cleared before our friend has a chance to get back to the States and find that what he's purchased is only a modern copy of a statuette already in the National Museum. And when you see your cousin, tell him that the tourist season starts in earnest next month and that I'll be able to handle as many of these figures as he can turn out."

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Match wits with Jerry the gas-station attendant.

THE TIPOFF

by JOSH PACHTER

It had been a slow night. I was just sitting in the office drinking pop and gabbing with Sherry when this old jalopy staggered in and settled down at the front pump.

I lifted myself out of my chair, polished off the last swallow of pop, dropped the empty bottle into the trash barrel, and said "C'mon" to Sherry. She stood up, dusted off the seat of her jeans, and together we walked out to the car.

The driver was a couple of years younger than me, maybe 19 or 20, with long black hair that curled over the collar of his faded denim jacket. He was trying to grow a mustache.

"Help you?" I asked.

"Fill it," the kid said. His voice was high, too high.

Upset about something, I thought. Probably had a fight with his girl.

"Reg'lar?"

He nodded.

I unscrewed the gas cap, set it down on the trunk, and began to pump gas. Meanwhile, Sherry grabbed the wiper and squeegee bottle and started to scrub road dirt off the windshield. After going with a gas-station attendant for more than four months, Sherry has turned into just about the best windshield washer in the business.

While the tank was filling, I circled around to the front of the car and lifted the hood. Surprisingly, the engine was in fine shape. The kid probably tuned it himself, frequently. I pulled out the oil dipstick, wiped it clean, shoved it back, and pulled it out again. Oil reached almost to the "Full" mark. The battery cells held water right up to the rings, and the radiator was full, too. I let down the hood.

The automatic cutoff on the pump had stopped the flow of gasoline, but I squeezed a few more cents worth into the tank, then replaced the cap. Eight and one-tenth gallons.

"Eight-one," I told the kid. "That's three dollars even."

He pulled a wrinkled old

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billfold out of his hip pocket and handed me a twenty-dollar bill.

I raised my eyebrows.

"Have to change this from the cashbox," I said. I headed back to the office, with Sherry at my side.

Opening the cranky old register I dropped the twenty into the empty compartment on the right and took out three fives and two ones.

I hadn't heard the car door open or close, or the office door either, but when I straightened up from the register and turned around, the kid was there. In the light of the office I could see him better. He was shorter than me, but built strong—about 180 pounds, I judged. His right hand was closed tightly around the butt of an Army service revolver, which he held pointed straight at my stomach.

"Okay," he said, his voice lower now, but still nervous, "take the money out of the drawer, nice and slow, and hand it over."

I looked at Sherry. Her eyes were scared.

"Move!" the kid yelped.

I moved. Like I said, it had been a slow night, but there was still close to $80 in the register. I silently scooped up the bills and, keeping as far away from the gun as I could, shoved the wad of cash into the kid's free hand.

He stuffed the bills into his jacket pocket and waved the gun.

"Over by the wall," he said, "and—"

There was a noise from outside, and the kid half turned his head, keeping one eye on Sherry and me. Through the plate-glass office window we could see a black-and-white police patrol car turn in at the far entrance and head slowly toward the pumps.

The kid licked his lips and shoved his gun into the pocket of his denim jacket. His hand stayed in the pocket.

"All right," he said quickly, "get rid of him as fast as you can. I'll be listening to every word you say. One slip and this pretty little girl here gets hurt."

Sherry gasped.

I stole a look out the window. The patrol car had pulled up right behind the kid's jalopy. Sheriff Roy Hainey was waiting at the wheel.

"Go ahead!" the kid said fiercely.

I pushed open the door and walked out to the pumps, trying hard to keep my knees from shaking. Halfway there I looked back over my shoulder. Sherry and the kid were standing in the office doorway, smiling and talking. The kid's

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hand rested almost casually inside his jacket pocket.

"Evenin', Sheriff," I said loudly, hoping I didn't sound as scared as I felt.

"Evenin', Jerry." Hainey nodded at the two figures in the doorway and added, "Busy night, huh?"

"Yeah," I told him, forcing a chuckle. "You need the usual?"

"Yep."

I started gas flowing into his tank, then walked around front and nervously swiped at his windshield and checked under the hood. The oil was low, but I slammed down the hood and said, "You're okay."

I shut off the gas pump, checked the numbers, and went up to the window on the driver's side. The sheriff's arm was resting on the door, and there was a five-dollar bill in his hand.

"Thirteen-six," I said. "That'll be five dollars and five cents, Sheriff."

Hainey glanced back at the pump, then nodded and dug an extra nickel out of his pocket.

"Thanks," I said, and I leaned against the pump as he backed up a foot or two, swerved around the jalopy, and drove off.

I almost ran back to the office.

"You did just fine," the kid told me.

"Terrific," I said tightly. "So take your money and get out of here, okay?"

"Sure thing," he smiled. "Only, just so you don't get any ideas—" He ducked into the office, lifted the receiver from the metal hook of the pay phone, and yanked on it, hard. The cord snapped in two. "I did some checking," he said. "There's no other phone within half a mile of this place, so I figure this oughta give me plenty of time to get away."

With a grin he sauntered off toward his car.

"Oh, yeah," he called back. "When you *do* get in touch with the cops, don't bother trying to trace me through this car. I, uh, borrowed it for the evening."

He laughed, climbed into the jalopy, and roared away.

Sherry fell into my arms.

Ten minutes later Sheriff Hainey pulled back into the station. The kid was sitting next to him, scowling, a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"Gun wasn't even loaded," the Sheriff announced. "Guess he just carried it for show."

The kid squirmed on the seat and looked up at me. "I heard every word you said," he muttered. "How'd you tip him off?"

"He asked me the same

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uestion," Hainey said, "but I nought I'd give you the leasure of telling him, Jerry."

I grinned. "I knew you were stening," I said to the kid, "so couldn't just come out and ell the Sheriff here what was oing on. So I had to do the ext best thing.

"Sheriff Hainey comes in ere every other night for gas, nd every time he comes I ump five dollars worth of egular into his tank. Just about hirteen and a half gallons. Now onight I deliberately gave him n extra nickel's worth of gas, vhich brought the total amount p to thirteen and six-tenths allons—thirteen-six. I was ambling the Sheriff would otice the difference and vonder why I gave him hirteen-six gallons, instead of hirteen-five."

"So what does that have to lo with anything?" the kid asked sullenly.

"Well, you see," I went on, "I live just a few blocks away from the police station, and when I was a kid I used to spend a lot of time hanging around down there. For a while I even wanted to be a policeman when I grew up; I'm still thinking about it. Anyway, the guys down there sort of liked me, and whenever they had time they used to teach me all kinds of things—how to take fingerprints, make plaster casts of footprints, that kind of stuff. One thing I learned was the police radio code. You know what I mean: 'ten-four' means 'over and out,' and all that.

"Well, in this county, the police code number for a stickup happens to be 'thirteen-six.' "

The kid spat out a word not usually said in polite company.

Then all of a sudden Sheriff Hainey burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" I asked.

"Thirteen-six!" he exploded. "I never even thought of that!"

"Huh? Then how—"

"I guess I should have thought of the radio code right off, Jerry, but it never even entered my mind."

"Well then, what'd you stop me for?" the kid demanded.

Sheriff Hainey wiped a tear from the corner of his eye. "You mean, how'd I know there was trouble here? Jerry, did you ring the pump back to zero after I left?"

I looked back.

"No," I said. "I was so scared about Sherry I must have forgot."

"Good." The Sheriff swung his car door open, walked around to the other side of the patrol car, and pulled his prisoner out. Then the four of us walked back a few steps, so we were standing right in front

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of the pump I'd used to fill the Sheriff's tank.

"I've been coming in here every other night for years now," Hainey said, "and every other night for years I've bought exactly the same amount of gasoline. Five dollars even. But tonight Jerry tells me five dollars *and five cents*, so I just naturally looked back at this pump here to make sure he wasn't making a mistake."

He smiled, and nudged the kid with his elbow.

"Now, you want to know why I pulled off the road ju out of sight and sat there wit my lights off waiting for you t come along? Well, I did i because Jerry sent me a S.O.S., just as plain as day!"

We all looked at where th Sheriff was pointing and, sur enough, right above the word "Amount This Sale," th numbers on the pump dial read

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AGATHA CHRISTIE *(about Miss Marple)*

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

We hope you didn't miss Joyce Harrington's first story—"The Purple Shroud," in the September 1972 issue of EQMM. It was an exceptional debut in print. But Joyce Harrington's second story is even better, even more impressive—a subtly conceived, sensitively written study in crime, as contemporary, as modern in feeling as tonight's late news. Oh, what a talent this new writer has!

THE PLASTIC JUNGLE

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

"If you stay in the Soft Goods you'll be all right." My mother's voice comes to me and I go on combing my hair. My hair is quite long now. I haven't cut it for four years, except when my girl friend, Alexis, trims the ends. Alexis' family is Syrian and my mother doesn't like me to pal around with her. Oh, God! There she goes again.

"Don't go in the Housewares Department. Mimi, do you hear me? Don't even go near it. It's not safe. Answer me."

She's standing in the doorway. Momma, don't you want me to get you a nice new scrub brush so you can scrub out the rest of your life? No. Be nice to Momma, she's at a hard time in her life. My sister says. My sister who lives in Great Neck and doesn't have to listen listen listen, and come up with an answer. I put on some lipstick and try to say something.

"Momma, I'm only going to buy a bathing suit."

The lipstick is crooked and I wipe it off. Forget it. I stuff things into my shoulder bag. She comes into the room and sits down on the bed plop like that. She dumps herself down when she sits. Always. Like a sack of somebody else's dirty laundry she's carried around too long. The bed shakes.

"A bathing suit, anh. What, one piece or two?"

"I don't know, Momma. I'll see what they have. Maybe I won't get anything."

I'm ready to go, but I

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haven't been released yet. I have to wait until all the questions have been asked. Until all the wrong answers have been given. There aren't any right answers.

"A bikini? Don't bring home a bikini. You bring home a bikini, I'll send it right back."

She won't though.

"All right, Momma. No bikini."

"You're going with that Alexis? She's not a nice girl, Mimi. I saw her in the pizza place smoking a cigarette."

So what should she be smoking, a cigar? No. My mother is still fighting the Six Days' War. Alexis is an Arab guerilla who kills Israeli babies. Would she like to see me in khaki shorts with a rifle on my back? Marching? Singing? Shooting Alexis? Would she?

"No, Momma. I'm going by myself."

"Don't lie to me. You never go downtown by yourself. Why can't you go with a nice girl like Rose next door?"

"No, really, Momma. This time I'm going alone."

Because Rose is a nice fat girl and it hurts both of us to go shopping together. Could you understand that, Momma? That Rose couldn't wear a bikini, and she would have to say they all looked terrible. And I would have to say something bitchy about her flab, and then we couldn't speak to each other for a week.

"You have enough money?"

Her hand is in her apron pocket pulling out the old black-leather change purse.

"Yes, I have enough. I have to go now."

"Here. Here, prices go up overnight. Everything goes up, nothing comes down. Just in case."

A weary crumpled five-dollar bill gets shoved into my shoulder bag. At last I can go. I head for the door.

"Thanks, Momma."

Her voice follows me to the front door.

"Be home for supper. Be careful. Don't go in the Toys, they're all plastic."

Out.

I go along Westminster Road and turn toward the subway. What do you do when your mother is crazy? Is everybody's mother crazy or only mine? She worries about plastic, she's afraid of it. Never mind about drugs, about Vietnam, about crime in the streets. My mother carries on a pogrom against plastic.

It's a menace, she says, and she won't have it in the house. I have to keep all my records at Lex's house. My sister says maybe she wouldn't be like this

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my father was still alive and if y brother lived closer and if e wasn't having a hard time ith the change of life. If. But e fact is that my father is ad and my brother lives in ew Mexico and my mother is azy. Be nice, my sister says, along with it. It's harmless.

I reach the subway steps and up. The subway is out in the pen here. Not really elevated, it running on tracks above the ound. Nice, to ride along eing daylight and the backs of ouses. Alexis is waiting for me n the platform.

My brother the college rofessor in New Mexico sends is monthly letter with a check r his monthly check with a tter. He helps out. It's very ot in New Mexico, they moved om their apartment to a little ouse near the college, there's a ice back yard for Jemmy to lay in, they are expecting nother baby in October and he idn't write that sooner because e wanted to be sure everything as okay. His wife, Eleanor, ad a miscarriage last year and lomma got so upset she had to o to bed for a week.

Momma reads me the letter fter supper. She cries.

"Why New Mexico," she noans, "so far away? Might as vell be China. He couldn't get a ob in New York?"

I'm eating my dessert while she's crying. She makes very good apple cake and my mouth is full of it. But I can't swallow.

"You could go visit them." I mumble around the cake and finally get it down. "You could go out there, take care of Eleanor, take care of Jemmy."

That does it. The tears disappear, dry as the Negev, dry as New Mexico, no more irrigation canals down the cheeks.

"Oh, yes, Madam. Who would take care of you? You are not yet as big as you think you are."

Right on, Momma. I'm not as big as I think. But who is? You, my little shriveled Momma with tear spots like watermelon pits on your blue wash-and-wear permanent-press coverall apron with a daisy on the pocket from Sears Roebuck?

"I could go and stay with Celia."

And spend the summer being built-in unpaid nosewiper for that batch of my mother's grandchildren. Listening to my beautiful sister, the heroic mother of three, complain about life as the doctor's wife. (He's never here when I need him, and when he is here he's too tired.) Who told her to marry the doctor?

"Momma."

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That's right. Blow the nose. You look great. It's all red.

"Momma. I could go stay with Celia. You could go out to Sam and Eleanor."

More Kleenex. Stuff it in the pocket. What does she do with all that damp Kleenex? Iron it out and use it again? Put it away neatly in a drawer for my inheritance? I give and bequeath to my youngest daughter, Mimi the Nuisance, all the Kleenex I cried into during her lifetime.

"Celia has enough to worry about. You think she needs you besides?"

Thanks. That may be the nicest thing you've said to me all day.

I push back my chair and start to clear the table. The dishes are odds and ends of old sets, chipped and cracked, replacements picked out of dirty bushel baskets set out on the sidewalk in front of Benny's Bargain Bazaar. When my father died, the good dishes, two sets, were packed up and shipped out to Great Neck. To Celia because she has a family and keeps a kosher home. We don't bother any more. It's my personal opinion that Celia stayed kosher just long enough to get her hands on those dishes and, of course, when Momma comes to visit. I start to wash the crummy dishes.

"So where's the bathing suit? Let's see this year's free show at Jones Beach." She's still sitting at the table, sipping her third cup of tea. The tears are gone, the Kleenex is gone, and she's ready for the next round.

"It's in my room. I got a job, Momma." I'm splashing around with the brown soap and the greasy dishwater (Momma won't get detergent because it comes in plastic bottles) with my back to her waiting for the eruption. It doesn't come. Nothing.

"Did you hear me, Momma? I got a job." I look over my shoulder and she's sitting kind of crooked in her chair with her eyes closed and her mouth open and her face turning blue. I should have known.

Then I'm yelling, "Momma, stop it!" But she doesn't stop it. So I grab the bottle of ammonia from under the sink, and my hands are dripping dishwater all over the clean floor, and the bottle slips, of course, but I finally get it under her nose and she breathes again. She gasps, she wheezes, she groans, and a few more tears roll down the old tracks.

"Come on, Momma. Go to bed."

"How can I go to bed? You made such a mess on the floor. Now I'll have to mop it all over again."

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"Never mind. I'll clean it up. You go to bed."

She lets me take her arm and start leading her out of the kitchen. She's all bent over like she's cuddling a pain next to her heart.

"I'm old and sick and all you want is to leave me. So get a job. What kind of a job could you get? You can't even wash dishes without flooding the kitchen." All this with more wheezes and groans, and she stumbles on the doorsill and nearly falls down. "It's just like the time with the plastic geraniums. Remember what the doctor said."

"Do you want a doctor now, Momma?"

"Who can afford a doctor? Who can afford to be sick? I'll go to bed and maybe I'll still be alive in the morning."

I get her into bed with two pillows and a heating pad. The television at the foot of the bed with the remote control next to her hand, this morning's *Daily News* and a copy of *TV Guide*. The television has plastic knobs, but somehow Momma missed that. As I head back to the kitchen to mop up the five water spots that make a deluge, her voice quavers after me.

"Mimi, be a good girl and bring a cup of tea and don't put too much sugar. And don't slop it in the saucer."

Okay.

While I'm waiting for the kettle to boil I'm thinking about Momma and the plastic geraniums. That was the start of it all. Almost a year ago. She had this box on the kitchen window full of plastic geraniums. She used to try to grow real ones but the window never got much sun, and she would forget to water them. So, okay, the plastic ones. They were bright red and always in bloom, and she liked them. No problems.

Then one day, she was hanging the laundry on the clothesline from that window, and she had a mild heart attack. That's what the doctor said. A mild heart attack. Take life easy, Mrs., and you'll be all right. You are not a young woman any more. You don't have to polish your house from morning to night. Did my dear Momma hear that? No.

When it was all over and she was back on her feet, all she could remember was that she was leaning over the geraniums and suddenly she couldn't breathe. The geraniums were out to get her. The plastic was stealing the air from her lungs. I came home from school one day and found her in the middle of one of the biggest house-cleanings I'd ever seen,

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even from Momma who is a champ in this field. And everything plastic was in the garbage can. Even my hair rollers and now I have to use frozen orange juice cans.

The kettle is screaming, so I make a cup of tea medium strong with a spoon and a half of sugar no milk and put a paper napkin on the saucer. I take it in to her but she's asleep half sitting up with the lights on, the television on, the heating pad on. I turn everything off and tiptoe back to the kitchen and drink the tea myself. The job will be first on the agenda at breakfast. If I like it maybe I won't go back to school in the fall.

The job is okay. I mean, it's no big deal, but it's kind of fun and it's nice to have a little extra money. Momma finally stopped moaning about it when she found out it was in the Infants' Wear Department where I would be relatively safe and I could get a nice discount on things for the grandbabies. It's part time. I work three days a week and still have enough time to go to the beach and get a decent suntan. Alexis is working here, too, in the Bath Boutique, but I didn't tell Momma that.

Every morning Momma packs me a lunch in a brown paper bag which I am supposed to eat in the employees' lunch room. She's in one of her quiet periods now, knitting a sweater set with bootees for Sam and Eleanor's new baby. Only complaining about the butcher (he's giving short weight), the heat (you don't feel it, Mimi, you spend all day in an air-conditioned store), and the plastic jungle (it sneaks up on you, Mimi, and soaks up all the air, so somebody should do something).

Every morning I take the brown paper lunch and shove it in my shoulder bag. Thank God the shoulder bag is big enough and I don't have to carry the lunch in my hand like a little kid. Sometimes I eat it, but sometimes Lex and I, we meet some guys we know from school, and then we goof around downtown at lunchtime and maybe have a hamburger or some pizza or something.

Momma should know, she'd really flip. I wonder sometimes if I told her, which would be worse, throwing her lunch away or meeting guys. With Momma you never know.

Every night we play twenty questions. What did you do today, Mimi? That's the way it starts. Then I have to tell her every item I sold, who I sold it to, was she pregnant and how far along, what the grand-

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mothers are buying, what new items the store has in for babies. It's almost like she was jealous, like she wishes she could be me, working in that dumb store. I mean the store is okay. It's only that when I have to tell her all about it, it sounds so stupid.

And always the last question, the wrap-up like they say on the television news. Did you eat your lunch, Mimi? Someday the president of the store is going to call her up and say I'm sorry Mrs. but your daughter was eating your brown paper lunch today in the employees' lunchroom and she choked on it.

Tonight a surprise. It's Thursday night and I've been working late. Momma has a snack waiting for me on the kitchen table, and she's waiting for me with a funny smile on her face.

"Guess what, Mimila?" She can't wait for me to sit down, wash my hands even. It's like she's about to explode with something. Maybe she won the lottery. She thinks I don't know she buys tickets and hides them.

"What, Momma?"

"Tomorrow I'm coming downtown! How do you like that?" She sits back in her chair with her hands on her thighs and her elbows out like she's just been crowned Queen of England.

"That's great, Momma." What are you gonna do? It is great. She hasn't been downtown since the plastic menace started. Maybe she's getting herself straightened out. Maybe she'll be all right now.

"One thing, Madam. I'm going to check up on you. See what kind of people you spend your days with. You can't be too careful."

"Momma! They're just people, salesgirls. What's to be careful?"

"And, believe me, if there's any plastic in that Baby Department I'm getting you transferred out of there. You'll thank me for it. You'll see."

There's no stopping her now. I'm wondering what happened today to set her off. And I'm thinking what she'll do when she sees all the baby bottles and potty chairs and rattles and junk at the counter next to mine.

"Momma, I only sell beautiful baby blankets and beautiful cloth diapers and beautiful clothes for beautiful babies. I don't touch any plastic. You don't have to come."

"Oh, yes, Madam. You don't want me to come." Now she's standing over me triumphant, and my feet are hurting from standing all day, and my head is

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beginning to feel like my feet.

"You don't know what I saw today, do you?" She's really in full swing now and all I can do is listen. "Down by the bakery I was. And out in front was a baby in a carriage drinking milk from a bottle. The mother was in the bakery and the baby was outside. So there I was looking in the window and thinking I might buy a loaf of seeded rye, and this baby starts crying and throws the bottle. What happened, Mimi? What happened?"

"Don't tell me. Momma, where's the aspirin? I got a headache."

"Don't try to change the subject. The bottle didn't break. The bottle did not break! And why not? *PLASTIC!*"

Momma is the picture of outrage, the protector of innocent babies from the plastic menace. Her arms are flapping a mile a minute, and her little body is stiff with indignation.

"So what did you do, Momma?"

"What did I do? What would you do? I picked up that plastic bottle and I dropped it down the sewer. That's what I did. Some mothers don't care what happens to their babies. The Mayor should make an emergency speech on television."

"Great, Momma. Why don't you tell him? In the meantime, is there any aspirin in the house?"

I'm holding my head in my two hands now because it feels like it's trying to break in half, and also so I can put my hands over my ears.

"There's some in my sewing box." Momma never keeps medicine in the medicine chest. God forbid anybody should be sick and not let her know about it. "Don't take more than two."

She follows me into her bedroom while I look for the aspirin and back to the kitchen for a glass of water, and her voice never stops.

"So the second thing I'm going to do tomorrow is buy two dozen regular glass bottles and send to Eleanor. They still make glass baby bottles, Mimi? I can't depend on Eleanor to be careful. She let Sam take a job so far away, how can I be sure she won't drown that baby in plastic?"

I swallow the aspirin and decide there's only one escape left. "Momma, I'm going to take a hot bath."

"Don't fall asleep in the tub. Remember, I'll see you in the Baby Department around eleven. Maybe we'll have lunch in Schrafft's. Sleep good, Mimila."

Later on I'm lying in bed watching shadows on the ceiling. My head is calmed

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down and my feet are just tingling but not hurting. Once in a while a car goes by and the lights race across the ceiling and down the wall.

I'm thinking about the times Momma and I used to go shopping and she knew that store inside out, where all the bargain counters were and what days there were special sales. It used to be fun to go with her, even though she never let me pick out my own clothes.

I remember one time I got lost in the store and they took me to the office on the eighth floor and said they would make an announcement over the loudspeaker. But Momma was there in the office before we got there. So we didn't get announced, and Momma only yelled at me a little, and then took me to the Toy Department and bought me a stuffed dog.

I'm lying here in bed thinking about those old things, and some tears are running down the sides of my head and getting in my ears, and I'm wishing for something to happen between now and tomorrow morning so Momma won't come downtown.

The next morning I'm dressed and out of the house before she gets up. She'll be mad I didn't eat breakfast, but I stop at Lex's house and have coffee and Danish and tell her what Momma's up to. Neither one of us can think of any way to head her off, so we go on to the store together.

All morning I'm so nervous I keep dropping things. I give the wrong change for a twenty-dollar bill and the customer yells at me and I almost yell back at her. Finally it's time for my break and I meet Lex in the coffee shop, but I can't eat anything. My hand is shaking so, of course, I spill my coffee all over the counter. The waitress comes to wipe it up and says "Clumsy" under her breath but just loud enough for me to hear, which she would never do if we were regular customers.

So I say, "Lex, I'm going back," and I go without leaving a tip and without even finishing my coffee break.

Angie, the regular full-time lady who works the baby counter with me, sees I'm not feeling so good, and she says, "It's not so busy right now, Mimi. Why don't you put away some of that stock?"

So for the next half hour I have my mind occupied with sorting out little undershirts and nightgowns and training pants and stuff, and things are pretty quiet before the noon-

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time rush, so I don't even notice when eleven o'clock comes and goes. And no Momma. I'm just sort of standing there in the middle of a pile of diapers, looking at the clock over the elevators which says a quarter after, and thinking, She's not coming. She's not coming.

Then the next to the last elevator opens and Alexis gets off and starts running toward me. Alexis is naturally very olive-skinned, but this is the first time I ever saw her look green.

I start to say "What's the matter?" But she just grabs my arm and starts pulling me to the elevator and it's like she can't say anything, but she finally manages to get it out.

"Your mother!" she says and then clams up and won't look at me in the elevator. And I shout, "My mother what?" And I'm thinking all the things Momma could do to make Alexis look like that, and what was she doing on Alexis' floor anyway which has the Bath Boutique and Housewares and the Pet Shop.

And then the elevator is stopping and we're getting off, and over to the right there's a crowd of people. Alexis is pulling me that way and starts shoving through the crowd, and a fat lady says, "Who do you think you're pushing?" But Alexis just lets her have it in the corset and starts yelling to the store guards who are trying to hold everybody back. "Here she is, here's her daughter!" And then Alexis starts crying.

I still can't see anything, but one of the guards takes my hand and makes a path for me through the crowd. In the middle of the open space there's a little bundle on the floor covered with a plastic shower curtain. There are shoes sticking out at one end, and I can see that they are Momma's best comfortable shoes a little rundown at the heels. I don't want to see what's at the other end. Maybe it's some other old lady wearing Momma's shoes.

The guards are shouting, "Stand back, stand back! It's all over." But nobody moves, and I can hear a loud voice saying over and over, "I saw it all happen. She got off the elevator and walked over here like she knew where she was going. Then all of a sudden she got this funny look on her face like she was lost. She looked like a little lost kid. And then she just fell down. I tried to get her sitting up, but she wasn't even breathing."

Then somebody is saying, "Are you the daughter?" My head is nodding yes, yes, yes, and I look and see it's the store

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manager and behind him is a short guy with a mustache and a black bag, and I guess he's the doctor. The store manager is holding my arm very tight like he's afraid maybe I'll scream or faint or something, and the doctor goes over and pulls back the shower curtain which is green with daisies all over it.

The doctor listens and looks and shakes his head, and then he looks up at me and says, "Is this your mother?" My head is still nodding yes, yes, yes, and Alexis is holding onto my other arm and bawling as if it was her mother. But I'm just standing there nodding and looking at Momma on the floor with a stack of yellow plastic dishpans on one side of her and a mountain of avocado-green plastic garbage cans on the other and at the end of the aisle a display of bright red plastic geraniums.

Some guys in white jackets come up with a stretcher on wheels, and the doctor is saying "Did she have a heart condition? Is there somebody you can call?" And the store manager says, "You can call from my office." So off we go to call Celia, with the store manager still hanging onto one arm and Alexis on the other, and she's saying, "You can come and stay with me."

But I'm thinking, now I'll have to go and live with Celia. Unless I can go stay with Sam and Eleanor. And I'm thinking I won't have much trouble choosing between Albuquerque and Great Neck if I have any choice. And then I'm thinking, I wonder how come I forgot to tell Momma they moved the Baby Department to the fourth floor and put the Housewares where the Baby Department used to be.

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a *NEW* "odd" story by

AVRAM DAVIDSON

The "Professor" was afraid that the 4361-year-old tradition would die with him.

THE LAST WIZARD

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

For the hundredth time Bilgulis looked with despair at the paper and pencil in front of him. Then he gave a short nod, got up, left his little room, and went two houses up the street, up the stairs, and knocked on a door.

Presently the door opened and high up on the face which looked out at him were a pair of very pale gray-green eyes, otherwise bloodshot and bulging.

Bilgulis said, "I want you teach me how to make spell. I pay you."

The eyes blinked rapidly, the face retreated, the door opened wider, Bilgulis entered, and the door closed. The man said, "So you know, eh. How did you know?"

"I see you through window, Professor," Bilgulis said. "All the time you read great big books."

"'Professor,' yes, they call me that. None of them know. Only you have guessed. After all this time. I, the greatest of the adepts, the last of the wizards—and now you shall be my adept. A tradition four thousand, three hundred and sixty-one years old would have died with me. But now it will not. Sit there. Take reed pen, papyrus, cuttlefish ink, spit three times in bottle."

Laboriously Bilgulis complied. The room was small, crowded, and contained many odd things, including smells. "We will commence, of course," the Professor said, "with some simple spells. To turn an usurer into a green fungus: *Dippa dabba ruthu thuthu*— write, write! *—enlis thu* You have written? So. And to obtain the love of the most beautiful woman in the world: *Coney honey antimony funny*

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cunny crux. Those two will do for now. Return tomorrow at the same hour. Go."

Bilgulis left. Waiting beside his door was a man with a thick brief case and a thin smile. "Mr. Bilgulis, I am from the Friendly Finance Company and in regard to the payment which you—"

"*Dippa dabba ruthu thuthu enlis thu*," said Bilgulis. The man turned into a green fungus which settled in a hall corner and was slowly eaten by the roaches. Bilgulis sat down at his table, looked at the paper and pencil, and gave a deep sigh.

"Too much time this take," he muttered. "Why I no wash socks, clean toilet, make big pot cheap beans with pig's tail for eat? No," he said determinedly and once more bent over the paper and pencil.

By and by there was a knock on his door. Answering it he saw before him the most beautiful woman in the world. "I followed you," she said. "I don't know what's happening . . ."

"*Coney honey antimony*," said Bilgulis, "*funny cunny crux*."

She sank to her knees and embraced his legs. "I love you. I'll do anything you want."

Bilgulis nodded. "Wash socks, clean toilet," he said. "And cook big pot cheap beans with pig's tail for eat." He heard domestic sounds begin as he seated himself at the table and slowly, gently beat his head. After a moment he rose and left the house again.

Up the street a small crowd was dispersing and among the people he recognized his friend, Labbonna. "Listen, Labbonna," he said.

Labbonna peered at him through dirty, mended eyeglasses. "You see excitement?" he asked, eager to tell.

"I no see."

Labbonna drew himself up and gestured. "You know Professor live there? He just now go crazy," he said, rolling his eyes and dribbling and flapping his arms in vivid imitation. "Call ambulance but he drop down dead. Too bad, hey?"

"Too bad." Bilgulis sighed. "Read too much big book."

Bilgulis cleared his throat, looking embarrassed. "Listen, Labbonna—"

"What you want?"

"How long you in country?"

"Torty year."

"You speak good English."

"Citizen."

Bilgulis nodded. He drew a pencil and piece of paper from his pocket. "Listen, Labbonna. Do me big help. How you make spell in English, *Please send me your free offer?* One 'f' or two?"

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a *NEW* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Inspector Mitch Taylor, Homicide Squad, was shopping with his wife Amy for a new coat. They were at DeFoe's, the best store in town, on account Mitch had some extra dough that was burning a hole in his pocket. And what happens? Amy got her new coat, a beauty, and Mitch got himself involved in a setup for murder—which also turned out to be a beauty . . .

C AS IN CUTTHROAT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

Sitting in the only chair he could find in the ladies' coat department of DeFoe's, Inspector Mitch Taylor, Homicide, saw the whole business start off right in front of him. He spotted both females and he kind of sensed something was up, but how was he supposed to know he was looking at the setup for a murder?

The thing was, he was at DeFoe's because of Amy. With all that extra dough practically burning a hole in his pocket he wanted her to get the best, instead of looking for a bargain. So he sat there holding her coat and her bag on account all the female shoplifters and all the dips in town were probably wandering around and grabbing off whatever they could. Because a sale like this, it was something like being at the airport when it's fogged in and everybody and his uncle is crowding around the ticket counter trying to get on the next flight out.

He noticed the redhead first. She was wearing a beat-up blue coat that she kind of threw across a rack, and then she picked up a nice new coat and took off for a dressing room. Still, it was none of Mitch's business, and what could he do about it, anyhow? He had to stick around here for Amy.

A little later he saw this other dame. She had on a gray coat with brass buttons, but the way that blonde hair of hers

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hung down you couldn't even see her face. Still, there was something about her. Mitch got just a couple of fast glimpses, like pictures flashed on a screen and then cut off.

What he saw was the blonde grab the ratty coat the redhead had left. Then somebody bumped into the blonde, and for a second or two it looked as if the blonde was going to sock the other dame, only she didn't. She stopped herself and kind of swung around, and a hunk of blue paper, maybe a ticket or something, fell down, and then Mitch spotted Amy in her new coat. And the way she looked at him he wouldn't have known it if a bomb had exploded.

"Like it?" she said, kind of twirling around for him.

Mitch stood up. "Yeah," he said. "Looks pretty good."

"It's expensive, Mitchell. It was on a special rack and I'm not even sure it's on sale."

"So what?" Mitch said, and stepped back to get a better look, which was probably when he stepped on the chewing gum. "You want to wear it home or get it wrapped up?"

"Wrapped up," Amy said. "And you'd better get in the line at the cash counter."

On the way there he passed the place where he'd seen the redhead and the blonde, and that seemed the end of it.

It was his day off, so he and Amy went out to dinner, which got rid of the rest of the dough. All it was was, Mitch had happened to be the guy who'd cracked a burglary ring. The guy that had been burgled, Mitch had saved him a wad of the green stuff and the guy was grateful. So Amy had herself a new coat, and Mitch forgot all about the redhead and the blonde until he was on the bus the next morning and saw the headline in somebody's paper.

Woman Stabbed to Death in DeFoe Dressing Room—that was the caption, and Mitch figured right off, without even reading the paper, that the redhead had been killed and that the blonde had a hand in it. Or a fingernail, anyhow.

At headquarters Mitch got the rest of the story. It seemed a female by the name of Eileen Sanders was supposed to be the chief witness in a prostitution case the Sixth Precinct had opened up some time ago. It had to do with a certain Madame Broue. The D.A. had assigned a guard to the Sanders female and the guard had driven her down to DeFoe's where she wanted to do some shopping. Because the nearest parking lot was full up, he let her off at the main entrance and said he'd meet her there when she came out. Which she never did.

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Perkins, who'd gone up to the scene yesterday along with Lieutenant Decker, didn't particularly like to talk about it.

"They found her in a dressing room, back of the coat department," he said. "There was a sign on the door, *Occupied*, which was thoughtful of whoever killed her. That's why they didn't find her until they were closing up the store. The D.A.'s guard blew it."

"Paper said she was stabbed," Mitch said.

Perkins shook his head in the negative. "Razor," he said, and drew his hand across his throat.

Mitch had seen that kind of a homicide. "Nobody noticed the blood coming out of the dressing room?" he asked.

"There was a coat wrapped around her middle, to absorb it."

"Blue coat, kind of beat up?" Mitch said.

Perkins gave him a funny look. "You getting visions or something?"

"Me?" Mitch said. "I read the papers, that's all." Which was good enough to hold Perk, for a while, anyhow.

Naturally, the Sanders case was top priority at the briefing session in the squadroom, and it went without saying that the whole Homicide Squad would be concentrating on it.

Lieutenant Decker got down to business right off and gave them the facts. "This Eileen Sanders," he said, after he'd outlined the case, "was not precisely a model citizen. Or citizeness." You could always figure the boss would throw in a little extra grammar. "She was one of those people who get around," he went on. "Part-time prostitute, part-time gun moll and underworld messenger—her name has appeared in a number of investigations and she seems to have had unlimited knowledge and contacts, although her basic trade was shoplifting. And brother, she was good at it."

Decker didn't usually hand out bouquets, but the dame was dead and so why not give the little girl a big hand?

"Her usual M.O.," the lieutenant said, "was to enter a store wearing an old coat—she bought them by the dozen from a Moore Street hockshop at two to five dollars apiece. She then exchanged one of these garments for the most expensive one she could locate, and she went to a dressing room where she ripped off the tags and stuck on a prepared label. She usually added a stain or two to make the coat look worn, and then she walked out with it. If accosted, she became indignant and threatened to sue the store.

"Yesterday afternoon she

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had apparently taken a new coat and substituted a chain-store label in it, with the probable intention of walking out with it. She was obviously followed into the dressing room by her killer. And that's about it. Any ideas?"

Mitch cleared his throat before he spoke up. "I can maybe help out a little," he said. "It just happened that me and the wife were in DeFoe's yesterday, on account she needed a coat. I maybe saw this dame—a redhead, wasn't she?"

"That's right," the lieutenant said.

"Well, there was this blonde, she had that long hair that hangs down sort of like a willow tree. The way they wear it you can't see much, and besides, I wasn't close. But she picked up the redhead's old coat and then went on back to the dressing rooms."

"So she could have done the slashing?"

Mitch nodded. "Could have, except I wasn't around to see."

"Can you describe her?"

"In all that mob and with a faceful of hair?" Mitch said. "I didn't see her for more than a couple of seconds before somebody got in the way. After that the wife came around and we got out of the place."

Decker glanced at his notes. "One of the salesgirls mentioned a woman with long blonde hair—she said she saw two or three of them. The one you saw, what was she wearing?"

"Gray coat," Mitch said, "with brass buttons. Looked like they might have come from a fireman's uniform, but I was a little too far off to be sure. And with that bunch of females—"

"Brother!" Decker said. "It's a wonder you got out of there alive." Which maybe meant something, and maybe didn't. So what it came down to was, find a dame with long blonde hair and a gray coat with brass buttons. And since you had to start somewhere, you began with all the contacts the Sanders female ever had.

It turned out there wasn't much to go on. Still, Mitch was glad he wasn't this guy from the D.A.'s office whose job had been to protect her. Mitch saw him sitting in the outer office, waiting for the lieutenant to take him apart.

A day like that, you know where you're going to get, which is nowheres, and by five o'clock when you get back and report in, you've had it. Your dogs hurt and you want to wash up and the way you feel, these anti-pollution guys are talking about you personally. So when Mitch got home the first thing he wanted to do was take his

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shoes off and get into his slippers. Only it seemed that Joey had wanted to find out if they'd float, which maybe they did and maybe they didn't, but they sprang some nice leaks and Amy had them drying out.

Mitch was kind of sore, but like Amy said, the kid hadn't meant anything, so why take it out on him? Which was when Mitch picked up the shoes he'd worn yesterday and saw the chewing gum, along with what was stuck on it.

It looked like a sales tag of some sort. It was blue and had a bunch of numbers on it including a price, which was a hundred bucks, and the size, which was nineteen, and how did that help? Still, on account you never know, he took the shoe to Amy and showed her the tag.

"Take a look at the one from your coat," he said. "I want to see if it's the same as this."

"It can't be," Amy said. "The tags on my coat were white, and besides, there's no such thing as a size-nineteen coat. The sizes go up to fifteen, or maybe thirteen, I'm not sure, and after that they only run in even numbers."

Mitch thought that one over. "Well," he said, "if it isn't from a coat, what then?"

"I don't know," Amy said.

"I have no idea."

But you can count on Amy. When you ask her something that maybe has her stumped, she stays with it, and around three in the morning she woke Mitch up.

"Mitchell," she said. "Wig."

He rubbed his eyes. "Are you going nuts or something?"

"The tag," she said. "It might have come from a wig. A long one, with a nineteen-inch fall." And that pretty much changed everything.

Mitch got down to headquarters about a half hour ahead of time and O'Connell, at the sergeant's desk in the big room where you first came in, almost fell over backwards.

"Taylor!" he said. "You get kicked out of the house or your watch needs fixing—which?"

"Important stuff," Mitch said, deadpan. "Me and the boss got to do a little eggheading."

"If he can sit up straight," O'Connell said. "That guy ought to be in bed. Flu."

"An excuse like that and he's down here?" Mitch said. "I always figured there was something wrong with shooflies." And Mitch went on in, down the corridor and through the doorway where it said *Homicide Squad.*

He knocked on the lieutenant's door. The lieutenant's voice, sort of wheezy, mumbled

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something and Mitch went into the little cubbyhole of an office. Like always when somebody came in, the lieutenant turned around in his swivel chair and made it creak, but he did it kind of slow. What with all the publicity about a girl getting her throat slit in the women's clothing department of the best store in town, and having the flu besides, the boss was taking this one hard. In a way, he kind of looked like an elephant that had lost its trunk somewheres.

Mitch slid his shoe out of the paper bag he'd been carrying and put it, sole up, on the desk. "That's what I was wearing when I was at DeFoe's," he said. The boss looked at Mitch like he thought Mitch had gone overboard this time, but Mitch went right on explaining.

"I stepped on a piece of gum," he said, "and right afterwards my shoe picked up this tag. And you know how you see things without really knowing it until a little later on. Well, that blonde dame dropped this tag. It came off something she was wearing."

"Sure," Decker said, coughing. "It came off a coat."

Mitch shook his head, real superiorlike. "They don't make size-nineteen coats," he said, "but me and the wife kind of doped out what it came from."

Mitch waited for the boss to sort of get the idea that he wasn't bright enough to figure it out like Mitch had done. Then Mitch let him have it.

"Wig," he said.

Decker shot up straight, with the flu just about knocked out of him. It was kind of like the elephant getting his trunk back. "Brother!" he exclaimed. "Oh, brother!"

Mitch let himself grin, because it wasn't often he went one-up on the boss, but the boss wasn't thinking of stuff like that. His mind was working, and he and Mitch were thinking neck and neck down to the wire.

"That's it!" Decker said, all fired up. "I felt there was something wrong about a woman cutting somebody's throat with a razor blade. Men do that, not women. So the problem is to find the guy who walked into DeFoe's wearing a blonde wig nineteen inches long."

"They call it a fall," Mitch said, quoting Amy. "A nineteen-inch fall, and the thing was maybe made to order. The usual length is seventeen, just right for the shoulders."

Decker didn't even bother making a wisecrack. "That makes it easier to identify," he said. His voice sort of wheezed and he coughed a couple of

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times, with the flu getting ahead of him again. "Better bring that shoe up to the lab and get the tag scraped off. Then send it down to the photo bureau. Art can make a couple of dozen copies to show around. Nice going, Taylor."

Mitch went out telling himself the flu did some funny things. Here the boss was falling all over himself telling Mitch how good he was, just on account he went and stepped on some chewing gum. Still, when the boss gives you a pat on the back, the thing to do is figure out what you're going to get out of it. Flu or no flu, you got to push it while it's on rollers.

Decker didn't kid around at the briefing session, the way he sometimes did, and he didn't make any cracks about stepping on stuff when you're not even looking for it. All he said was, Taylor had come up with a lead that looked good. Thanks to a lucky break, he'd found the sales tag for a wig the killer had probably been wearing. Copies of the tag would be waiting outside, and everybody had the same assignment: check all the places that sell wigs, and when you get the right one, find out who bought it, and when.

With a start like that it's your day, so Mitch wasn't surprised that he was the one who walked into the store with the sign on the window, *Felston Farley, Wigs.* Even from the outside you could tell this was one of those joints where they buttered you up and then doubled the price, and maybe wouldn't even do business with you unless they knew who you were or you came recommended.

There was a coat of arms on the door, and inside, the place looked more like a lounge than a shop. There were some comfortable armchairs, and the walls had a bunch of autographed pictures and one of them was the governor's wife.

The guy standing there, he had one of those high thin noses and he looked all the way down it like he had you at the bottom of a microscope. Which didn't bother Mitch a bit. He was interested in wigs.

He identified himself and said, "We think you can maybe help us out. Does this tag mean anything to you?" And Mitch showed him the copy.

Farley hardly looked at it. "That's my label," he said. "Why?"

"Can you hook this up with any particular wig?"

"I believe it's a blonde wig with a nineteen-inch fall."

"Know who bought it?" Mitch asked.

"I don't have the name, but

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this is one of the very few items we've sold off the street, so to speak. Usually we create our headpieces to match the personality of the wearer."

"Tell me about this sale."

"As I remember, a man and woman came in together, and she made the choice but he paid for it. When I suggested she try it on, I met a very determined negative."

"You mean she wouldn't. Any reason why?" Farley shrugged, and Mitch said, "Could you identify the man if you saw him?"

"I believe so."

"And the woman?"

Farley wasn't so sure about that. "Well," he said, "it would depend. If I saw her—"

"I mean from a picture."

"I have a better mental image of him than of her. Why? What's this all about?"

"Sanders case," Mitch said, and watched the guy. Because when you throw stuff like that at them, where they know from the newspapers it's a big case, they're more likely to cooperate. But all Farley did was to lick his lips.

"Well," he said, "whatever I can."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Can I use your phone?"

He called headquarters, but it seemed the doctor had ordered the boss to go back to bed and stay there. Anything important, you could get through to him, but at his age rest was necessary.

Mitch decided to let him rest. Stuff like this Mitch could handle himself, so he told the sergeant he'd located the wig and they could call the Homicide Squad back. Then Mitch arranged with Farley to come down to headquarters and look at a few pictures, only Mitch had to set it up first. He'd get in touch later on.

Mitch was about to leave when this springy little dame wearing a curly black wig came popping in.

"I heard what you were saying," she said breathlessly. "Can I help? Is there anything I can do?"

"Sure. Can you identify either of the two people that bought this wig?"

"No, I didn't see them. But anything else—"

"Anything you think of, you let me know," Mitch said, and he left.

He wasn't sure he had anything, but Perk was in the squadroom and he and Mitch talked it over.

"We got a bunch of names from up in the Sixth," Mitch said, "and we're pretty sure the Sanders dame was killed because she had the goods on some of them. But unless they

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got a record, how can we get their pictures to show Farley?"

"I was up in the Sixth this morning," Perk said. "You know this Randolph guy?"

"Curly Randolph?" Mitch said. "He got busted last month for having a couple of beers while he was on duty, didn't he?"

"That's him, and he knows more about this case than anybody else around. Madame Broue's place where the thing broke—Curly thinks she's okay and they're making her the patsy."

"So what?" Mitch asked.

"A Mr. Beef, he was giving the Broue dame protection, but he had a run-in with her and she turned on him. That's what ticked the whole business off. So she wants to cut his throat and he wants to cut hers."

"Only the throat that got cut was this Sanders dame's. What are you getting at, Perk?"

"They had a big testimonial dinner for Mr. Beef last month," Perk said. "Mr. Beef had all his boys there, including the hoods. One of them could have got himself a wig and sliced up the Sanders dame, who was poison to him. To Beef, that is."

"Sure, but what are you driving at?" Mitch said.

"Get Art to blow up the picture of that banquet, give your wig boy a magnifying glass, and let him study that picture. He'll find us our killer."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "I was figuring on doing something like that. It's the way the boss would handle it."

It was Perk's turn to say, "Yeah." He made it sound a little fishy, so Mitch gave him a V sign and walked off.

A few hours later they had Farley looking over photos from the Assault File. He drew a blank. Then they switched off the lights and set up a screen and a slide projector—Art had made slides instead of a blowup—and they put them on the screen. And that was when Farley stuck his hand out and pointed to a guy in the back of the banquet hall down near the end of one of the tables.

"Him!" Farley said. "I'm sure of it." And all that was left was to find out the guy's name.

Curly Randolph supplied that particular piece of information, and the way Mitch saw it, Randolph was good enough to rate a homicide job one of these days. Anyhow, he came up and looked at the picture.

"Gumbo Watts," he said. "One of Beef's hoods. Look him up and see what you got on him."

There was plenty, and from his record you could tell he had

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a lot of political muscle behind him. Because he was full of suspended sentences and dismissed charges and stuff like that, and all of it for things like armed assault and suspicion of homicide. So it was up to the Homicide Squad to go out and find him, and that would just about wrap up the Sanders case.

They sent the good news up to Decker, but three days later, when he came back at his desk, they were still looking for Gumbo Watts.

The boss didn't say much, but he looked unhappy. The F.B.I. had been notified and a national *Wanted* card was out for Watts, but it was no soap. And it was funny how the boss let his men know what he was thinking. He didn't come out with anything in the squad-room, at the regular briefings. Fact was, he didn't give out much of anything at those sessions. He looked kind of pale and said there was nothing new, and then he asked if anybody had any ideas. Which shows pretty much what the flu can do to you. The only thing he said that meant anything was, "I got a feeling this Watts is dead. And not from the flu, either."

Still, word got around on what Decker had in mind. The squad sort of picked it up out of the air, from pieces he said to one of them and then to the next. Mitch, for instance, was in the lieutenant's office when the boss was talking on the phone to Duryea, in charge of the Sixth.

"Randolph around?" Decker said. Then, answering something from the other end, he said, "Europe? He went to Europe on vacation? What the hell made him go now, just when he's in the center of the Sanders case? He knows more about it than anybody else, doesn't he?"

So Mitch came out and told Balenky what the boss had said, how the boss wanted to get hold of Randolph.

Bankhart had another hunk of information about Randolph. "Seems he just took off," Bank said. "Went on his own, then didn't come back."

It was maybe the fourth day when they heard that Watts's body had been identified down in Tennessee, where there was some kind of a gang war going on. He'd been called in by one side, but he'd been mowed down before he'd even squeezed a trigger.

Perk reported that the boss wasn't so sure it had been exactly that way. "Something he said," Perk remarked, "makes it look like he has the idea this was an execution."

Later on that day Small saw

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the lieutenant about something else and came out rubbing his hands together, which was a sure sign he knew something.

"This Curly Randolph," he said. "They located him. In Paris."

"Paris?" Mitch said. "What's he doing there?"

"What does anybody do in Paris?" Balenky said. "Well, he's doing it, too, while he's waiting for the Broue case to cool off. Seems the D.A. isn't so sure any more that he wants to prosecute."

It was around then that Amy mentioned this screwy idea about where she could buy a wig. Mitch got a little teed off and told her she was nuts, he liked the way she was. She just sort of smiled, like she had a secret, so Mitch said he'd go up to Farley's and see what he could do. He could maybe get a little discount, which to Mitch's mind meant about ninety percent off, or maybe even a hundred. Only Amy objected.

"I don't want an expensive wig."

"You want a *cheap* one?"

"Mitchell!" was all she said. So what do you do about that?

He kept trying, anyhow. He figured if he just went up to Farley's and got a nice wig and brought it back, Amy would go for it and forget about the dime-store stuff.

He went up to the wig place late one afternoon, only Farley wasn't there. Instead, Mitch found this springy little dame running the place. She'd had a curly black wig on last time, only this time she was wearing a red thing tied up in a bun.

"You're Mr. Taylor," she said, kind of making eyes at him. "Did you want to see Mr. Farley? He's out."

"I just wanted to look around," Mitch said. And, what with one thing and another, they got to talking.

It seemed her name was Edie and she had a boy friend who was divorced and paying alimony. He'd been burned once, and besides, he couldn't afford to get married again. Which was one of the reasons she was working here and learning the business.

Then she was off and trotting, telling Mitch all about it and how the important thing was to have the right hair. And you had to have a big inventory of it, too, so when somebody came in for a custom-made job you could show them a sample of exactly what you were going to give them.

Anyhow, they got to jawing about this and that, and Mitch asked her why she got into the business in the first place.

"It's so *interesting*," she said. "You meet all kinds of

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people. Just look at those pictures on the wall, all the way from society women to call girls. Whenever he can, Mr. Farley gets hair from them, although his main source is from the morgue. Because all we use here is human hair, never synthetics."

"No kidding!" Mitch said. "I bet his clients don't know about the morgue. And what would the governor's wife say, for instance, if she found out her wig hair came from some call girl?"

Edie giggled. "Mr. Farley would just about kill me if he knew I'd told you. It would ruin his business. Can you imagine what those uppity society women would say if they found out?"

Mitch didn't have to do any guessing. "It would ruin him all right. That and the morgue stuff. So you think he'd kill you for it?"

Edie looked scared then. "That was just a figure of speech. And Mr. Taylor, it's way past closing time and I have to go home. Just as soon as I get my coat."

She came out with a gray coat that had brass buttons, and the buttons had the insignia of the fire department on them.

"Mind if I look at that coat a minute?" Mitch said quickly.

"Of course not. Why?"

"I was noticing that stain," Mitch said, pointing to a discolored patch on the front. "How did that get on?"

"I don't know. Something must have spilt on it, because I remember it was clean the other morning, and when I got home it was stained. Maybe something rubbed off on it while I was on the bus."

"It was maybe the day this Sanders dame was killed?" Mitch said. She nodded, and Mitch said, "Maybe your boss borrowed it without your knowing it, and maybe the Sanders dame was going to tell where he got his hair from. And like you say, that would just about ruin his business."

Mitch brought her and the coat up to the lab, and the stain was blood all right and it matched up with the samples from the Sanders dame. Then they got Edie another coat and sent her home, while they picked up Farley.

Guys like Farley, they fall apart once the pressure is on, and he admitted he hadn't sold that blonde wig to anybody. He'd made up the story about selling the wig, when actually he'd taken it out of stock, borrowed Edie's coat, and gone out after the Sanders dame. He'd happened to phone her in the morning, so he knew she'd

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be pulling her regular racket at DeFoe's. And in the course of the conversation she had told him Watts was dead. So Farley pointed out the Watts picture as the man who'd bought the wig, on account Farley figured a dead man could never contradict him.

What with all the work you got to do checking up on a confession like that, it was after midnight when Mitch got home. Amy had waited up for him, and she was wearing this funny wig that made her look like a Halloween witch.

"It's for Joey's party," she said, laughing. "That's why I didn't want one of those expensive wigs from that store you knew about."

"Yeah," Mitch said. "Only why didn't you tell me?"

"Because of the peculiar way you acted, as if I had no rights of my own. And I bought a wig for you, too. A magician's. Would you like to see it?"

"Tomorrow," Mitch said, yawning. "Amy, it's been quite a day, and I'm pooped."

Like everybody knows, there are some things you don't talk about, you just let people kind of draw their own conclusions. Like, for instance, the way everybody said it was pretty smart of Mitch, the way he'd gone up to the wig place just on a hunch.

When anybody asked him about it he had a stock answer. "It's the way things go," he said. "These hunches, sometimes they work out and sometimes they don't. This one was a beauty."

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a *NEW* short story by

PATRICIA McGERR

A terrific suspense story—one destined, we're sure, to become an anthology favorite . . . Husband, wife, lover—and a deadly game of cyanide roulette. Each man had a 50-50 chance to survive and have everything his heart desired. Which one would it be? The old man, Zeus? The young man, Apollo? . . .

WINNER TAKES ALL

by PATRICIA McGERR

Philip Wade sat at the desk in his study and read the note he had just written.

My darling Laura,

What I am about to do will cause you shock and, perhaps, pain. But I know that you love someone else and you are more dear to me than my life. So tonight I shall toast you for the last time with a glass of poisoned cognac. Do not grieve for me, my sweet. In the four years you have been my wife you have given me great happiness. I choose this way to set you free with the hope that you too will be happy.

Yours till death,

Philip

Not, he thought, one of my best literary efforts. A bit oversentimental. Some might even call it corny. But it should bring a tear to the eyes of readers of the morning tabloid if it is ever printed.

If. He spoke the word aloud, then inhaled deeply. Is this, he asked himself, my final hour? Will tomorrow's papers carry my obituary? He closed his eyes to visualize the headline. *Best-Selling Novelist, Age 54, Takes Own Life.* What will they say of me? Which book titles will they list? How will they appraise my artistic worth? Or will they dwell instead on my folly in marrying a girl young enough to be my daughter?

He smiled grimly, shaking off the questions. He would not, after all, be there to read his last reviews.

But it was not too late to

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draw back. When Don Talbott arrived, he could say he'd reconsidered, did not wish to play this game of cyanide roulette. And then what? They'd be back at the beginning, as they were six days ago when he'd confronted his wife and secretary with evidence of their adulterous relationship. He could divorce Laura and fire Talbott. Then Wade would be alive and rich and alone. And the other two would be together and poor. Because that solution satisfied none of them, Talbott had suggested tonight's trial.

"Let's meet," he said, "and set out two glasses, one containing poison. Then you and I, Mr. Wade, will both drink and one of us will die. The survivor will have Laura."

"And my money," Wade snapped. "That's at the heart of it, isn't it? If I use this evidence to get a divorce, Laura will have nothing. But if I die, she'll be a wealthy widow."

"That's true," the younger man admitted. "Since she married you she's grown used to luxury. I don't want to deprive her of that. But we love each other. It's not something we planned, it just happened. And now we're trapped."

You've lain in bed, Wade wanted to say, now try to make it. Good riddance to you both. But he could not bring himself to speak the words. It was too easy to understand their situation and see his own mistakes. It was his wealth and fame that had attracted Laura. But she had been a loving and faithful wife until, a year ago, he had brought into their household this handsome virile young man.

Looking at Talbott, Wade was painfully aware of the contrast between them. He could not wholly blame Laura. Nor could he take pleasure in seeing her reduced to penury. And he had an anguished awareness of how bleak his own future would be without her. It was then that he began to take seriously the other man's bizarre proposal.

In the week that followed they worked out the details. Talbott was to supply the poison, an insecticide concentrate whose taste and smell could be masked by brandy. Laura would pour the drinks, poison one, then set the glasses in front of them.

"Laura," Wade objected, "is not a neutral party. She'll let you know which drink is safe."

"I don't blame you for being suspicious," Talbott conceded. "But we can't bring in an outsider. And if you have the first choice of glasses and I take the one that's left, there's no

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way we can make you the loser."

Wade thought it over and subdued his doubts. It was, as Talbott said, a gamble. A 50-50 chance, winner takes all. Laura had promised, if he lived, to stay with him and try to make their marriage work. That was a gamble too, but with her lover permanently removed, a fresh start was possible. He weighed the alternatives—to risk death or let her go—and agreed to try his luck.

The test was set for 8 P.M. on Sunday evening. Each man was to prepare a suicide note to forestall any police investigation or talk of murder. Now it was nearly 7:30 and Wade, his own note ready, had nothing to do but wait. He laid the paper on the desk top, straightened it until it was in the exact center of the blotter. Half an hour, he thought, half an hour and then—

A light tap on the door made him jerk erect. "Yes?" His voice was pitched unnaturally high. "Who is it?"

"It's me, Phil." Laura opened the door, slipped inside, and closed it behind her. "I've been going crazy, waiting alone, wondering what was going to happen."

"It'll be all right," he said ineptly. Looking at her, he was once more sure of the rightness of his decision. She was as small and soft and tawny as a kitten. A strand of fair hair drooped over one eye and she pushed it back with a characteristic gesture that made his loins tighten; then she came to kneel beside his chair and look trustingly up at him. She's still a child, he thought, and touched her cheek with a comforting pat. He could not, even now, condemn her for her infidelity.

"I'm frightened, Phil," she said. "All the time you and Don were talking about tonight, it seemed like—well, like some game you were playing. But it's real, isn't it? You're actually going to do it?"

"Yes, it's real. But it's also a game. One with very high stakes. My note is finished. Would you like to read it?" He handed her the paper and watched with a certain pride of authorship as she scanned the words, then looked at him with brimming eyes.

"Oh, Phil, I can't bear it. It's so beautiful. How can you be so kind to me when I've been so wicked?"

"You're not wicked. You met a man your own age, an attractive man, and you fell in love."

"That's not true. It's you I love. What I feel for Don is ugly and cheap—it has nothing to do

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with love. I was too dumb to see the difference till this week when you've been so good, so forgiving. Then when I realized that you might—that I might lose you, that's when I knew how much I love you, need you. Phil, you mustn't be the one to die."

"If that's how you feel"—he smiled with a sudden lightening of spirit—"then nobody will die. We'll send the young man packing and you and I will have a special celebration. Where would you like to go, my dear? Name any place on the globe and we'll have a second honeymoon."

"I wish it were that simple." She lowered her head till her brow rested on his knee and her voice was muffled. "You don't know what he does to me. It's not love, not love at all, but I have this terrible longing. From the time it began I tried to stop him, tried to break it off, but I'm too weak. When he touches me, or even looks at me, it's like I was on fire. Oh, it's awful to say these things. I hate myself for hurting you, but I have to make you see how it is. Whatever promises I give you, I couldn't keep them. Not so long as Don's alive and wanting me."

"And if he were dead?"

"Then you and I could be happy again—the way we were before he came and spoiled things." She raised her head to look up at him. "Please, Phil, we've got to arrange it so he's the one to die."

"I'm afraid that's in the hands of Fate."

"It doesn't have to be. I've been thinking and thinking about it. You get first pick of the glasses, don't you? And he's obliged to drink from the other one."

"That's the way we planned it."

"Because you didn't trust me. But Don does. It will never enter his head that you and I might plot against him."

"So?" He waited for her to continue.

"Which glasses are you going to use? Have you decided yet?"

"Yes, they're set out and ready. The big ones with the drawings of gods and goddesses that you've always found so amusing."

"Then it will be easy." She scrambled to her feet, moved swiftly to the alcove that was fitted with a small bar. On its top Wade had placed a decanter filled with cognac, a small silver tray, and a set of six snifters. Into the bowl of each was etched a mythological divinity. Laura picked out two and brought them back to place on the desk in front of him.

"Here's what I'll do." Her

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face was alight with youthful enthusiasm. "I'll pour your drink in this one." She pointed to the bearded image of Zeus. "And the poison will go in here." Her fingernail made a faint *ting* as it tapped the curly head of Apollo. The old man and the young, Wade thought wryly. Easy enough to remember which is which.

"He'll never suspect," she said eagerly. "Even after he's drunk the poison, he'll think it was just bad luck. And then—oh, darling, it will be the way it was before, only better. I'll make it up to you, I swear I will." She leaned close and pressed her mouth on his with a fervor that bordered on fierceness. The doorbell pealed and she broke away. "Oh, God, he's come. I'd better get out of here. We don't want him to know I've been talking to you."

She hurried away. Wade, moving more slowly, returned the glasses to the bar and went to answer the door. He felt a little stunned by the swift change of events. She loves me, he thought, she's never stopped loving me. With Talbott it was only a physical thing, a kind of enslavement. But that's over and she'll be all mine again.

Yet when he opened the door to admit his young rival, the figures of Zeus and Apollo came unbidden to his mind and the doubts began. Am I, he asked himself, an utter fool to believe she prefers me to him? Were all her protestations, her tears even, a well-rehearsed act, one the two of them had planned together to make sure I would take the poison?

He led the way toward the study, stopping at the foot of the stairs to call up to her. "Laura, Talbott's arrived. Will you join us, my dear?"

"No use wasting any time, I guess." Talbott was nervous. He took from his overcoat pocket a small bottle filled with dark liquid. Walking over to the bar, he put it beside the glasses. Then he removed his gloves, thrust them into his coat pocket, took off the coat and hung it on the rack in the corner.

"You've written your note?" Wade asked.

"Yes, it's here." Talbott reached inside his jacket for an envelope which he gave to Wade.

"Mine's on the desk." Wade read the inscription on the envelope, *To Whom It May Concern*, and took out a folded sheet.

"The woman I love doesn't love me and I don't want to live without her. My will is made and I'm going to take poison. Goodbye to all. Donald Talbott."

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Not much style, Wade thought critically, but it will serve the purpose. At any event, Talbott was too obscure for the press to be interested in his death. If it got a brief mention it would be due only to his association with Wade.

"That says it all." Talbott turned from the desk where he too had been reading. "If you're satisfied with mine, we can get on with it. Ah, Laura, come in. We're just ready for you."

She entered silently, her eyes cast down, not looking at the young man. Is she afraid, Wade wondered, that he might read her treachery in her eyes? Or is it the other way? Does she fear my intercepting a glance that will reveal their conspiracy?

"I'll put this on the desk too." Talbott took his own note from Wade and slid it back into the envelope. "You can say I gave it to you just before I drank the poison. And of course after—after it happens—the one who's still alive must be sure to destroy his own note before he calls the doctor. Once that's done, there shouldn't be any problems."

"You—you brought it?" Laura asked. She still didn't meet his eyes.

"Yes," Talbott answered. "The bottle's on the bar. Empty it, all of it, into one of the glasses. Then put in enough brandy to reach a level of one inch. Be sure the level in the other glass is exactly the same. We'll turn our backs so we can't see what you're doing."

"When the drinks are poured," Wade added, "put the two glasses on the small tray and set it down on my desk. Then we'll make our choice."

They watched her walk toward the alcove. As soon as she reached it both men turned round to face the door.

"It should be quick," Talbott said, "and, I hope, fairly painless."

Wade said nothing. His mind was circling like a rat in a cage. Was she lying? Can I trust her? Is she putting poison into Zeus or into Apollo?

He heard a clink as the decanter struck the rim of one of the glasses, then a gurgle as the brandy was poured. A few seconds of silence and the sounds were repeated. Live or die, he told himself, it will soon be over.

Laura's light steps, behind them, approached the desk and the two men turned round again. The girl's hands shook as she put down the tray. The liquid sloshed in the bottom of the glasses.

"Better pour one for yourself," Talbott advised her. "Our story is that the three of us

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were having a drink together when it happened. There should be three glasses to bear it out."

Obediently she turned back to the bar. Wade studied the two snifters standing side by side on the silver tray. Each held the same quantity of liquid. There was, so far as he could see, no variation in color. They differed only in the decorations. Zeus and Apollo. Apollo and Zeus. If Laura was honest, Apollo held the poison and Zeus was harmless. But if Laura had deceived him—

He looked again at Don Talbott, whose attention was fixed on Laura's back as she poured the third drink. They've been lovers for six months. Compared to him, I'm old and worn and have nothing to offer her but wealth. By putting the poison in Zeus's glass, she can have both my money and the man she loves. But by choosing Apollo, I can spoil their plans, dispose of him, win her back.

And yet—suppose she told me the truth. She cared for me when we were married, I'm sure it wasn't all pretense. She was faithful for more than three years. The affair with Talbott may be an aberration. She understands her own weakness, knows that only his death can free her. Can I believe her, take Zeus's glass and live?

Laura came toward them, carrying her drink in one hand. She stopped a few feet away and gazed at her husband—a lingering look full of promise that made his pulse race. How could I not believe her? he asked himself.

"Ready, Mr. Wade?" Talbott broke the silence. "Your choice."

"Yes, I—I'm ready."

He moved close to the tray, put out a hand, and hesitated.

Zeus or Apollo?

Apollo or Zeus?

He could feel the other two holding their breath and at last he reached a decision. Better to die, trusting her, than to live with the knowledge of her betrayal. Worst of all would be to doubt her wrongfully and die for his lack of faith.

He picked up the glass that bore the image of Zeus. By force of habit he cradled the bowl in his hand to warm it and passed it beneath his nose to savor the bouquet. Is it cyanide, he wondered, that smells of bitter almonds? Inhaling deeply, he got only the aroma of his own best brandy.

Talbott had taken the other glass. He raised it, looked over its rim at Wade. "To the woman we both love," he said.

"To Laura," Wade seconded.

Simultaneously the two men put the glasses to their lips, swallowed the contents in a single gulp, then stood still,

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waiting. Wade felt a sudden chill, a churning in his stomach, a weakness in his knees. His mind whirled with panicky questions. Am I poisoned? Are these the symptoms? How soon will it take effect?

He wanted to look at Laura, to seek in her face an answer, but he could not turn his head. Then Talbott cried out.

"Oh, my God! My throat—it's on fire!" The glass dropped from his hand, rolled toward the desk. He clutched his throat with one hand, covered his mouth with the other, and dropped to his knees. His body formed an arc.

"Please—somebody—help—" Talbott slid slowly down and forward till he was lying prone. His shoulders arched convulsively, then fell, and he was still.

"That's it," Laura said. "It's all over."

"Yes." Wade put his empty glass back on the tray and ran a dry tongue over drier lips. Averting his eyes from the body on the rug, he took an unsteady step backward to drop into the leather chair beside the desk. His whole body was drenched in cold sweat.

"Darling, pull yourself together." Laura came close to him. "We've got to be sure our stories are straight and everything's in order before the doctor comes."

He looked at her, amazed at her self-control. Her lover was dead, by her arrangement, and she was completely calm. But she was right. They must both keep their heads until after their stories were told, until after the authorities had come and gone.

"I'm all right," he said, but he had to clench his jaw to keep his teeth from chattering.

"Here, drink this." She handed him her own untouched brandy. "You mustn't go to pieces now."

He took the glass, drank quickly, and tried to give her a reassuring smile. But there was something in her gaze that made him colder than before. She turned away from him.

"It's done, Don," she said. "He drank it."

Unbelievingly, Wade watched the man on the floor lift his head and start to rise. Then Wade's vision blurred, the room seemed to spin, and pain struck deep in his stomach. They've won, he thought. It didn't matter which glass I chose. Laura poisoned her own drink.

He sank back in his chair with his head lolling forward, staring down at the glass in his lap. The last thing he saw was the figure etched on its surface. A scantily clad nymph with bow and arrow. Diana, the huntress.

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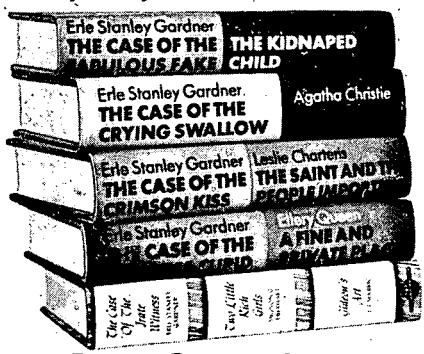

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